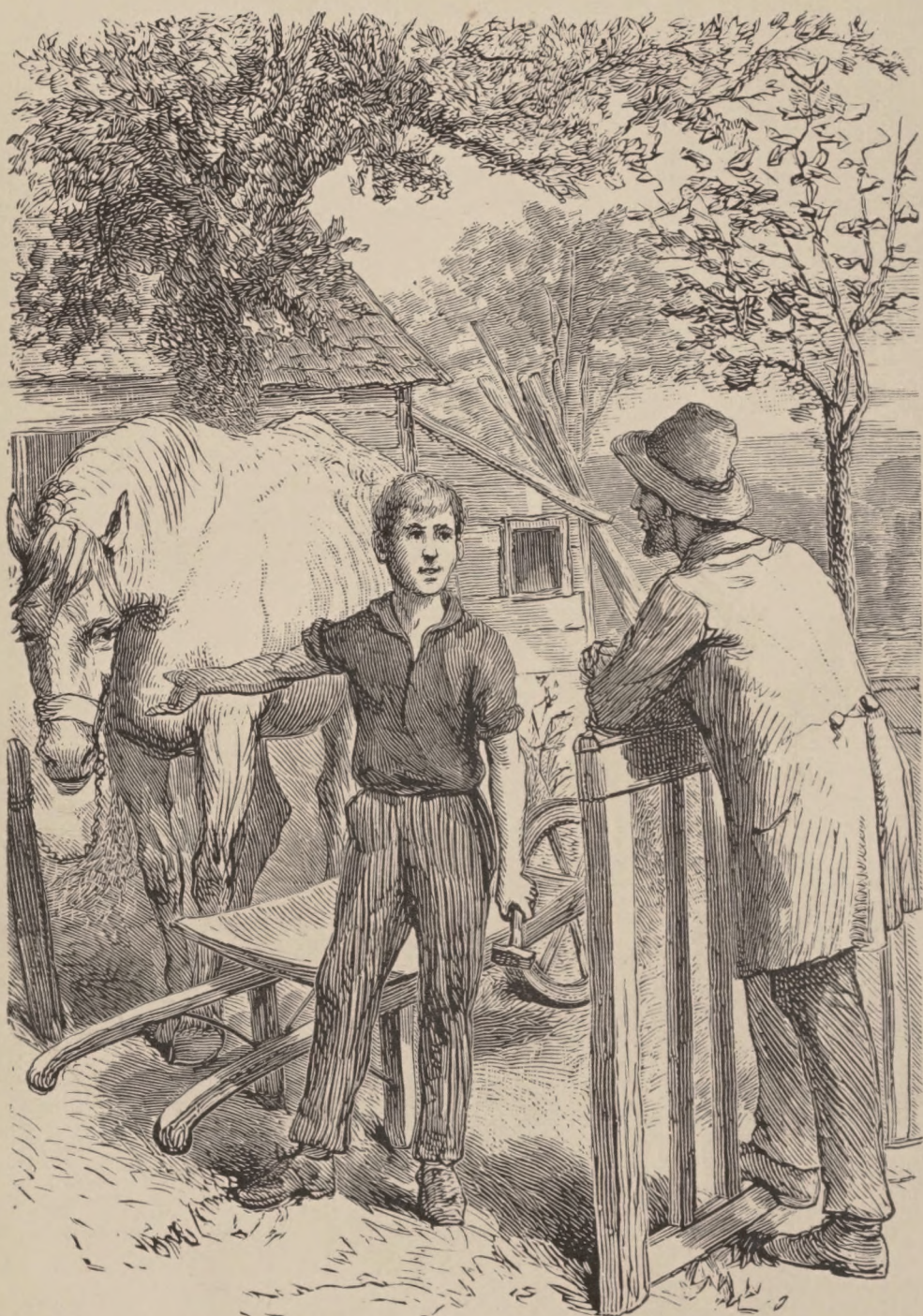


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“WHEN HIS GRIT IS UP HE CAN PASS ANYTHING ON
THE ROAD.”

Page 47.

HOW BILLY WENT UP IN THE WORLD.

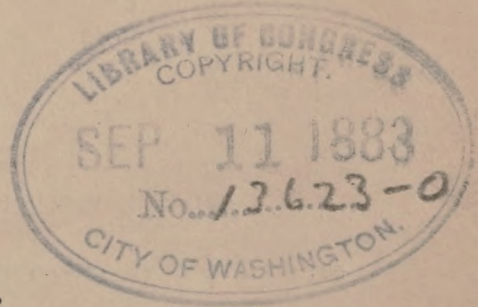
A STORY FOR BOYS.

BY

ANNETTE L. NOBLE,

AUTHOR OF "THE QUEER HOME IN RUGBY COURT," ETC., ETC.

35



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HOW BILLY WENT UP IN THE WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

THE BALLOON.

THIS is the story of a boy who had red hair, a good appetite, and much else in common with other boys ; one who rose very high in the world, and who came down and rose again, not so high, but in a better way. He was not a genius, or I should not tell his story ; for there are so many boy geniuses now-a-days in books that the record of a common red-haired child may be more interesting, as a change.

One day, fifteen years ago, there had been a county fair in Langham. The

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grounds were full of people, even at six o'clock in the afternoon. But under the tent the gay bed-spreads, the oil-paintings, the hair flowers, and the wax-works were being taken down, while the farmers' wives were exchanging compliments, sample biscuit, and currant jelly. Outside the canvas the men were taking away the cattle—the great oxen with prize tickets on their horns, or sheep, or swine, or poultry. Everywhere there was bellowing, grunting, shouting, scolding, and some grumbling. This last was chiefly done by a noisy party who came to the fair, not to bring the grain, or cattle raised by their industry, but to stare at the two-headed calf never raised by anybody, to bet on horses, to steal water-melons, and to join at last the crowd that was elbowing around a man with a balloon, in which he was to go up when ready. This balloon, already inflated, was fastened by a rope to a well-driven stake, and floated a little way

above the ground. Among the lookers-on, some who pretended to know declared that it was not a very good balloon, and must surely come to grief.

After a while the man drew down the car low enough to get into it, and cried out: "Does anybody wish to accompany us in our grand aerial flight?" He said "us," as sounding fine; but he immediately explained that he would take a light gentleman only.

In a moment there shot from the crowd a long-legged keen-eyed boy about fourteen years old, who nimbly stowed himself into the car, amid great laughter and shouts of "There goes Billy Knox!" "Good-night, Billy!" "Bring us down a star, Billy!" and like efforts at wit.

"Did you ever see a chap so ready and willing to risk his life for nothing?" asked somebody; and another man answered coolly, "'Tain't no loss if he does break his

neck ; nobody owns him, and the world will be well rid of him."

Billy heard the heartless words, and turned to look at the speaker, while the owner of the machine arranged the ropes before getting into the car.

Suddenly, like a bubble from a pipe bowl, up rose the balloon, Billy in and the man out ! The crowd gave a gasp of surprise, the man stared stupidly, and then, just too late, leaped up like an acrobat, and clutched—only air ! Billy, moving slowly up, sat like a statue ; but loud and clear came down from the car a cry, not of terror, almost one of triumph.

"He'll be killed, sure," said the former speaker, emphatically ; and his companion echoed, "Don't seem to care a bit about it either, just as you said."

Some of the people thought it a trick of the owner of the balloon, but his frantic denial and his evident distress at the loss of

his property proved it to have been a mishap. Meanwhile the news flew like the wind over the field, and in a moment hundreds of faces were upturned toward the vanishing balloon. Everybody hoped the boy would not meet a dreadful death, though a goodly number said it might better be Billy than any one else; and all alike watched, not sorry, if such a thing must happen, that they were there to see it.

Up, up, went the car, and "nobody's boy," was rising far above the earth. The sunset light smote his red hair, and made it glitter like gold. But Billy was soon too far away for the crowd to jeer at him, even if the roughest could have done so while the boy was in such terrible peril.

Billy looked down once and shouted. Then he began to wish that his conveyance would travel sideways, instead of rising so steadily.

It occurred to him at last that if the man

who owned the balloon were in the car, he would probably turn some "stop-cock," or other, and let himself down. However, Billy was not sure that he wanted to go down, even if he could.

As he rose higher and higher, the people on the ground below him began to look like small things crawling, and the great white tent almost like a card-board house. He questioned whether or not he should meddle with any mysterious part of the balloon. He remembered, not unpleasantly, having heard some one early in the day say it would certainly collapse of itself. If collapse meant to come down, to meddle with it might be to turn on steam and send him beyond the sun and moon, where he had no desire to go. He sailed across a forest, over a river, lost sight of the fair ground, and then began to come nearer earth, slowly nearer, then faster, the car rocking in a way that threatened to dump him out.

“We are surely ‘collapsing,’ ” thought Billy. He grew a little dizzy, the earth seemed coming to meet him, and all the houses, barns and hay-stacks were inflated, in their turn, and getting bigger. At last a gnarled old tree that had been charging straight on the balloon, ran into it, upset, tore it, and after entangling Billy in ropes and branches, tearing his clothes, scratching his hands, and switching him like an old-time school-marm, let him fall roughly down to earth. He was glad to lie quiet, thinking first of the torn balloon, then of himself.

While he was thinking, the words that he had heard that afternoon as he entered the car came back to him : “Nobody owns him, and the world will be well rid of him.”

Heretofore he had been proud of the fact that nobody owned him. He had never thought of himself as a nuisance to the community. Billy had not much sentiment, but to-night his heart ached as well as his limbs.

He had thought of all his past life as intently as a boy could think. He had begun to take care of himself when he was only eight years old. He dimly remembered his poor mother as always enveloped in the steam from hot soap-suds, a practical kind of a halo, the result of her efforts to feed him with honestly earned bread. She died and left him to the care of a drunken father, who two years later followed her to the grave.

The town gave Billy a home in the poor-house, but he stayed there only three days. At the end of it he resolved to start out into the world and earn his own bread. He ran away to the nearest city, where he blacked boots, sold papers, learned a certain amount of evil in the streets, and some good in a night school. Finally he tired of city life, and started for California; but after getting ten miles on the way, his money gave out, and his courage too. He found himself in the town of Langham, and there he staid,

doing odd jobs when he could get them, and at other times amusing himself as best he could.

There never was a fire that Billy was not close behind the hose-cart, or a circus that he did not ride the kicking donkey, or a county fair, where he was not present looking out for anything in the way of fun that offered. His last undertaking was going up in a balloon. Now here he was, down again, and the question was, what should he do next?

A boy in a book would have decided to become a judge, or a merchant, or an artist; but Billy had another ambition. He desired to become a negro minstrel. He knew one, a man who wore fine clothes and had plenty of money. He earned it by being funny—oh, so extremely funny.

While Billy was considering the matter, he heard a voice, and looking up, saw a man following a cow. Naturally enough, the balloon attracted the man's attention, and he came near enough to discover the boy.

A conversation followed, in which the whole story was told.

"Well," said Billy's new friend, who proved to be a tailor in a very small way of business, "how do you feel now?"

"Lonesome, and sort of empty."

"Do you mean hungry?"

"Perhaps that's it," said Billy.

"Then you may come home with me to-night," said the man, "and after supper I'll see if the balloon is spoiled."

"It is only collapsed," said Billy, very pompously; but when, on getting up to walk, he found his clothing reduced to about half what he had before, he assumed a meeker tone, and followed his new friend thankfully. The cow going first, turned down a lane bordered with sunflowers, and stopped before the door of a wee red house. A moment after, a small figure with a tin pail came out of the house, and sat down to milk the cow.

"This is my son Ben," said the host.

At first Billy had taken the child for a girl, for the little boy's checked apron came down to his copper-toed shoes, and he wore a green sun-bonnet, under which Billy saw soft white hair, and a very sweet face. They entered a kitchen, small, bare, but very clean, where a table was spread with blue dishes, brown bread, baked apples, and cold pork. In the chimney-corner sat a little old woman, who sang as she rocked. She was very deaf, but she smiled on Billy, on the tailor, and on her little grandson. She would have smiled on anybody, as to that. But a grandmother's kind face being new to Billy, he thought it beautiful. He found the supper exceedingly good, if not very abundant, and he was interested in watching Ben. The child soberly washed the dishes, and neatly swept up the crumbs, saying very little. The reason for his silence was after a while apparent to Billy: little Ben stuttered.

After supper, the room being warm, and

Billy being tired, he dozed in a corner of the old lounge. While he slept the tailor went to see about the balloon, and stayed a long time.

Later in the evening Billy was awakened by a voice. Ben was reading to his grandmother. She had her cap off, and her hair was as white as snow. She was warming her feet over the last coals, while Ben held a candle in one hand, and bent over an old book.

“ ‘He shall call upon me, and I will answer him,’ ” read the boy, in his awkward, stuttering tones. “ ‘I will be with him in trouble. I will deliver him, and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation.’ ”

Billy did not catch the last word, for the child could scarcely pronounce it, but he asked, abruptly, “Who will do it?”

The old grandmother heard the boy's voice, and answered: “God will do it all for those who love Him.”

“Folks like you, old and good, I suppose,” added Billy, as she tottered away to bed.

Once she would have stopped to teach him some holy lesson, but now she had crept in her feebleness so close to the door of heaven that she was forgetful of all darkness that might be behind her for younger travellers. Billy fell asleep again, then waked up blinking. The outer door was open, and Ben was pulling, bracing, and otherwise guiding his father into the house.

When the tailor was safely dumped into a wooden chair, he began to jabber about the “b’loon, you know — scientif’ — experiment. If I got a chance — like to own b’loon myself — always was scientific.”

“Humph! that’s it, is it?” said Billy, stretching out again for the night. He had seen too much of life to be either shocked or surprised. Doubtless Ben could get his drunken father to bed alone; and the child did indeed do it, as he often had done it before.

CHAPTER II.

THE MINSTREL TROUPE.

IT was a spring evening, so very fair that even Billy Knox had taste enough to be pleased with the robins, the hedges, and the May blossoms. He was halting on his way home, under the tree into which he had fallen eight months before. The balloon was not there; it's owner had it back long ago.

That Billy had a home is to be accounted for in this way: The evening after Peter the tailor took him in to supper, he remained overnight, and after breakfast he went out and milked the cow. He walked to the woods and chopped fuel enough for a week. Then he staid to dinner. During the after-

noon he found three cents in what was left of his trousers pocket, and he put that at once into the family treasury. In the days that followed he haunted the next town, a larger one than Langham. Whenever he earned anything he returned with it to the red house with the sunflowers, where, without any talk about it, he came at last to consider himself at home. He brought in as much as he ate. He amused little Ben, and made his life much more exciting. Peter did not care how long he staid, so that he paid his way.

On this particular evening Billy seemed in the highest spirits. He leaped up joyously and hung from the branches of the tree. He was prancing about like a colt, when down the lane came a man, but not Peter. This time it was Squire Ellery, who owned the house in which Peter lived. He was a hard-working, quiet-appearing farmer, respected by everybody.

"I ain't going to do it," exclaimed the boy, hastily.

"What are you going to do instead?" asked the man. "Are you going to grow up a loafer and turn out a tramp?"

"No; I have got something prime on hand that suits me exactly."

"What is it?"

"Well," began Billy, "you know the Annerly Minstrel Troupe, don't you?"

"Yes, I know of them."

"They stay in the town all winter, but summers they go travelling around the country. I have been helping them for nothing lately—odd jobs off and on—and they like me. Once, when the 'end-man' was sick, I took his place at the last minute, and I made so much fun that the manager said he would take me along this summer and make a crack performer of me. He will give me some clothes, and when I get valuable to him he will pay me well. Ain't that something like?"

“Yes, Billy Knox, it is something like—something like a monkey, more like a fool—for you to smut your face, to tell silly jokes, to grin and giggle and dress up in petticoats at night, that you may learn to swear and drink and gamble by day. That is what it is like, exactly.”

The farmer laid his hard hand on the boy's red head, but his voice was soft, as he said kindly: “Take more time to think it all over, Billy. Remember, I promise to feed, clothe, and send you to school winters, and when you get valuable to me I will also pay you wages. Your work will be hoeing corn and potatoes instead of braying like a donkey or thrumming on a banjo; but you will respect yourself a good deal more. It will be better to wash the sweat of honest labor off your face than to be smearing it into a black-amoor's. I will help you make a man of yourself if you are only willing and ready, Billy.”

The boy thought of dull days in the fields, with oxen for companions; then of foot-lights, gay music, and laughter. He rubbed his boots on the grass, and muttered: "Much obliged, Mr. Ellery, but I ain't ready for that, nor willing either, in your way of doing it."

"Very well; I have said all I am going to say. I shall never ask you again."

Billy trudged home rather soberly. He opened the cottage door a little later, and at his footfall Ben sprang from the pantry and stood anxiously watching his pockets. Billy knew exactly what it meant. Ben had gone to the cupboard: "And when he got there the cupboard was bare." This had often happened of late. Billy pulled out of one pocket a few slices of bacon, and out of another a tiny paper of tea, saying: "Granny, I have got you some to-night—tea, granny."

"O yes. When you were in your cradle, I told my husband you would live to take care of me."

"She thinks you are father," stuttered Ben, as he got out the frying-pan. Soon the whole place was filled with the welcome odor of bacon and tea. Billy cut some bread, and seizing granny's chair, pushed it to the table. He stared at her while she asked her blessing, and idly watched the sunbeams in the rusty lace of her old cap. When she opened her eyes, which were as blue as a baby's, she added, tenderly: "God bless you, dear: you brought us a good supper."

It was seldom that she spoke so coherently, but a bit of a prayer often seemed to clear for a moment her mind, as a precious drop might act in some unsettled mixture.

"What if granny should not have any supper some night when I am gone?" was the thought that rushed into the boy's mind, and into his eyes came tears. His heart was touched by the thought. What preachers and teachers and offers of help had never been able to effect, the trustful gratitude of a

feeble little old woman had accomplished. He choked, spluttered, and pretended he had swallowed the tea the wrong way. Then he did like unto sinners the world over—he tried to harden his heart again. He reflected that this was Peter's home and Peter's mother. It was Peter's business to support his own family. It was Billy's business to rise in the world.

After supper he made ready for certain exercises very common in the cabin of late—exercises which he considered likely to improve him in his chosen "profession." He pushed granny's chair back into the chimney-corner, and waited until she dozed before he exclaimed, "Come, Ben!"

Poor Ben! his face grew more mournful than ever. It was no longer any fun for him, but he patiently consented, and arranged the stage "properties." He tied on his own and Billy's black masks and their stiff paper collars, wishing much that his own did

not so savagely cut his poor little ears. He then sat meekly down at the end of the semi-circle of seats and solemnly got off all the laboriously learned jokes that his stammering tongue could compass. He surrendered himself to Billy in a waltz that made every lock of his lint-white hair fly out straight, and which finally left him breathless under the table legs.

Well, after Ben had been, with some changes of costume, a giraffe, a Zulu, a Broadway belle, and a propounder of conundrums, he became so incapable of being anything else but a tired little boy, that Billy relented, and let him lie on the ragged old lounge. In the quiet that followed, the older boy's brain began to work upon a question that worried him much. Should he go on a farm, or should he follow his own fascinating plan? He waked up Ben, and told, in a most engaging way, of the wonderful minstrel career which opened before him, and he

reported Squire Ellery's offer, but not his words of disapproval. Now Ben, who was but eight years old, had his own thoughts, and all the more of them, that he gave so few away in words.

"If it was me," said little Ben, promptly, if somewhat sleepily, "I would rather be out in the sunlight making th-th-things gr-gr-grow. Wheat fields are so pretty, and I like ca-ca-cattle. They always seem to know me if I co-co-come near them. I never would dance until I got dizzy if I could help it. I think it is si-si-silly; it ain't being a man."

Billy gazed at Ben, somewhat surprised. Here were words almost like Squire Ellery's, coming as if they were quoted from out of this Hop-o'-my-Thumb.

"Ben," he said, "you don't really know anything about minstrel shows. Some day I will take you to the regular thing."

"I would rather stay here and read to granny. I should be afraid."

"Stay, then, you little coward!" said Billy, roughly.

Granny dozed and snored softly; the lean cat sprang into Ben's arms, and they slept peacefully together; while Billy walked the room, and peered out of the window-panes. He half decided that he would go to the farmer in the morning. Then he half decided that he never would go. At last granny awoke, and said, "Bring the Book and read good words; we have had enough of this day."

Ben would not wake up. He really could not do so after his hard evening exercises; and when Billy shook him, the cat took Ben's part, and scratched Billy resentfully.

"Well, I would as soon read as to hear him stutter over it," said the older boy, getting the Bible, the cover of which had been bright and fresh when granny had been so herself. Now it was as nearly out of its binding as was her soul.

“ ‘The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle,’ ” read Billy, just where he opened the Book. Then he asked, “ Wouldn’t they fight?”

“ Able, but not willing to do what a body ought to do. I don’t remember about the fighting. Perhaps it was only to endure something. Now I will go to bed,” said granny, forgetting that Billy had read but one verse.

When he was left alone, he sat and pondered on those children of Ephraim until Peter tumbled into the house in his usual state. Then he let Ben sleep on, and he himself helped the tailor to bed, doing it with much less ceremony than the latter approved of.

CHAPTER III.

PETER THE TAILOR.

ONE day it happened that the tailor had not been home for twenty-four hours. Billy's coming into his family had made Peter very negligent. When he failed to bring food for the old woman and child, he assured himself that most likely Billy would get some. Peter was sure he ought to do that much for the shelter of a comfortable home. So every week the tailor drank more and staid away from that home longer; but Billy, wholly absorbed in his own plans, hardly noticed the fact; and Ben never complained of anything that could be endured. As long as the cow had fresh grass, they had milk, and did not suffer. If

it happened that Billy heard granny ask for meat, he got it for her; if not, she went without and forgot it from one meal-time to another. Indeed, she forgot everything but her Bible.

Well, as I have just said, Peter had not been home for twenty-four hours. Sunset came, and Billy did not return. The minstrel troupe were getting ready to leave town, and he was probably with them. The cow did not come home as she had often been accustomed to do, of her own accord.

All these non-appearances made Ben very uneasy. He laid the table with empty dishes, and then watched on the door-steps. The stars came out and winked at him; the crickets made lonesome music. Presently granny tottered across the room, took up an empty cup, and shook her head musingly.

"Was the tea strong to-night, dearie?" she asked. "It seems as if it must have been poor stuff, I feel so weak."

"You have not had any, granny, but I guess we will s-soo—" began Ben, and then stopped. It did not seem worth while to stutter long over a thing so doubtful. But when the old clock struck eight, Ben took his torn hat from the peg behind the door and said, "I am going after Brownie; she must have got into Mr. Ellery's pasture."

"Yes, child. The green pastures and still waters," answered the old woman. "And there is the Shepherd, you know. I shall not want."

"There isn't any shepherd there, and we must go after our own cow when she stays away, granny."

Ben shut the door gently then, and went down under the sunflowers along the road and over a narrow bridge, stopping to look into the rapid stream where the cattle came to drink at noon-time. Yes, sly Brownie was in the neighbor's pasture; but she took little Ben's grave rebuke very meekly, as

became a good cow, and started away home. She reached the bridge and clattered over it, her hoofs shaking the unsteady planks.

As soon as he saw her headed in the right direction, Ben lingered to look longingly up the main road, for it was not so dark that he could not see if any one should happen to be coming down that road. He was just turning to go on, when he discovered a man in the distance. As Ben saw him walking first in the dusty road, then in the dewy mayweed of the border, now here, now there, he sped briskly toward him to act as a walking-stick. How often he had performed this sad duty before! Yet there was no hesitation or delay in the way he sprang forward to help the unhappy father, who had done so little for his child.

“Humph! I should think you had better be on hand—leaving poor fellow to find his way home all ’lone this time night.”

Ben did not answer. He had all he could

do to keep his small feet out from under Peter's great boots, and to keep both himself and his unhappy parent from falling to the ground. At the bridge they made more noise than even the cow had made in crossing. The old planks creaked and rattled, while Peter lurched from one side to another.

"Take care, father! See, oh, s-s-see!" stuttered Ben. "You go too near the edge!"

The shrill warning came too late. Peter staggered, pitched, and reeled over into the brown water. One hand vainly snatching at Ben, only tore the shabby straw hat off his head. The poor child gave a long, loud shriek for help. Fear loosened his stammering tongue, and the cry, "Father will drown! Come, oh, come!" rang out wildly over the fields. Meanwhile, by kneeling, he had seized the drunkard's coat, and was able to hold him at least a moment.

It seemed an hour to Ben. Peter struggled madly, and flung both arms around the frail boy to draw him recklessly down with him to death. Over he went, without resistance, and the leaping, sparkling, stream that was so beautiful by day swept over them both. The stars twinkled overhead, and the crickets chirruped in the crisp grass, and at that very moment Brownie was softly lowing at the little red cottage door. Granny waked up and called out in the silence and shadow, "Bring the good book, Bennie, then we will go to rest."

Two hours later Billy came gayly whistling home, and found the cottage dark, the fire out, and the poor old woman shivering, troubled to understand the strange stillness around her and her own discomfort. He lit a candle and looked on the lounge, expecting to find little Ben curled up there asleep, but the kitten, mewing pitifully when he disturbed her, was there all alone.

“Where can he be, gran”— The words were arrested on Billy’s lips. Farmer Ellery entered the room, and motioned to him to keep still. A woman who followed him led granny tenderly into the next room, while outside the door Billy heard muffled voices and many footsteps.

A moment later, how his blood seemed to freeze with horror! The door opened, and sad-faced men brought in on a plank, torn from the old bridge, Peter the tailor, dead! His pallid face gleamed through the matted hair, the water dripped from his clothing; and clutched tightly to his breast was poor little Ben. The child’s soft locks streaming back, showed the sweet face that looked to Billy like an angel’s, so pure was it now. The patient little helper! Billy burst into tears. He forgot the stuttering, the baby pinafore, the copper-toed shoes that used to make Ben so funny. He all at once remembered how he gave himself so lovingly to

everybody's service — to his, to granny's, to the miserable father's, even unto death. It seemed as if Billy must get him back, if only to tell him how much he loved him. But that could not be ever again !

Farmer Ellery and the other kind neighbors made every effort to restore the two to consciousness ; but all was of no avail. They could only keep the sad condition of things from the poor old woman until morning, and then vie with one another in bringing her comforts.

The next few days were very strange ones to Billy. He never forgot an hour of that morning when he sat on the door-step in the warm sunshine, and peeped every now and then into the cottage, where, on the old lounge, made white with snowy linen, was a child, strewn from head to foot with apple-blossoms.

“ He was not great, or handsome, or very smart,” thought Billy, “ but he will be missed,

for he was good, and he loved everybody. He was always ready and willing to help, or to do, or to suffer. He was worth twice as much as I am. Nothing is left for me but granny. I'll have to make up to her the loss of both of them."

Suddenly there came into Billy's mind the thought of his chosen occupation. Was he not to start out as a minstrel that very week?

I doubt if Billy had ever thought as much in all his life before as he did in the days that lay between the time when little Ben was brought home so cold and white, and the funeral, when the kind neighbors buried him away out of sight under the green sod. He seemed to be taking a new view of life altogether. He could not have told the reason why, but the idea of starting off with the minstrel troupe seemed to lose its fascination. He would have to leave that little green mound behind him, and he did not want to do it.

It was two days after the funeral when, as Farmer Ellery was at work in his field, there appeared quite unexpectedly a red head over the fence near him, and then a boy with a very earnest face.

"Good-day, Billy. Going to leave us, I hear."

"No, sir. I have come to say I want to make a man of myself by being just a hard-working boy, if you will show me how. And could I work for enough to keep an old lady, do you think? I am going to keep her, anyhow. The town sha'n't have granny. I am sorry I refused your offer. That minstrel nonsense is no go for me."

Billy's face grew as red as his hair, but he went on in a minute.

"Her Book tells what a fellow ought to be, you know, and I think I had better get into being something worth while. If I turn short around, maybe I can"—

“ Make the most of yourself, with the help of God.”

“ That is it, exactly.”

“ Come over the fence. Take a hoe and begin,” said Farmer Ellery.

CHAPTER IV.

THE REAL BEGINNING.

WHEN Billy had worked a while in silence, the farmer stopped, and leaning on his hoe handle, said, with a kindly smile, "Let's attend service now for a little while!"

As Billy stared at him, he went on :

"There is a great deal of preaching done, my boy, that is not done by parsons. The good Book says : There are 'many voices in the world, and none of them are without signification.' I can hear some of them this morning. Can't you?"

Billy pushed his ragged hat up from his forehead and listened, his bright eyes wandering from the moist brown earth at his feet

to the new dandelions scattered like fallen stars on the near pasture land, then up to the intense blue beyond the farmer's picturesque old windmill. He heard no "voices"—nothing but the twitter of birds in their honey-moon days of house-building and the faint low of cattle away by the brook, whose sight he hated of late.

"Don't you hear the Spring voices all saying: 'Now is the starting time, boy! We are young and strong.' So are you. Everything depends on the way you begin. There is only one chance to plant yourself for growth in your life-time; only one season for the proper blossoming. Billy, I want you to stay where you start this morning until you give yourself a chance to grow."

Mr. Ellery went on hoeing after that, and Billy mused on his words with a tolerably clear understanding of them. By-and-by Mr. Ellery said: "I have engaged Prissy Tarbox to come and live in the cabin; she

will take care of granny for the rent and the milk. She is a good-hearted, smart woman, so the old lady will fare better than she had fared before ; but you must be kind to her, all the same."

"There, now! I could have gone with Annerly just as well as not," was the thought that flashed across the boy's mind—with the quick image of the minstrel "show ;" but after that came another memory, that spoiled the fancied fun. Poor little Ben, stumbling about, wearied with his tiresome mimicry. Once and for all Billy said to himself, "Whatever I am, I wont be a fool! I'll work!"

At twelve o'clock a girl about Billy's age appeared in the farm-house door and blew a horn ; it was the signal for dinner. Several hired men came toward the kitchen, stopping first to wash in a neat little room adjoining the wood-shed. Billy thought the kitchen, with its spotless tables, its dresser full of bright tins and blue crockery, simply magnificent ; while

to have corned beef, three kinds of vegetables and a pudding, was an experience for his stomach unprecedented in the past. As the farmer saw him eat, he doubted about his ability to move the hoe again that day with any degree of liveliness, but he said to wife, later: "We must have patience. When any fellow is apparently all stomach, that must be pacified before his conscience can wiggle or his heart beat worth a snap. I have believed in Billy, because, while half starved, he did appear to have a feeling for his old granny. Let him eat against time for a while."

Singular as it would have appeared, Billy could have eaten even more that very day; but he was a little bashful in the presence of a girl. It was his first encounter with one who wore good clothes and lived anywhere in particular. He had borrowed and lent money and food to certain wild little news-venders and "black-headed-Jim girls" of the

various cities where he had dwelt, but "Nan" Ellery, as her father called her, was a different creature. She was so sleek and bright that she made Billy think of a young colt. She had eyes that filled with fun when half the boy's knife seemed to vanish down his throat with his pudding; and while he was "mad" at her for seeing—as of course she must see—how red his hair was, he wished that his hair had happened to be as black as her own, which was braided in one long tail down her back. Mrs. Ellery, who sat at the head of the table, was a fine-looking pleasant woman. The men, who rolled down their shirt sleeves and put on linen jackets before coming to the table, were sensible, good-natured fellows. But there was one other person present whom Billy thought rather an impressive individual. He was a boy about sixteen years old, with a handsome face, and he was a trifle dandyish in his stylish clothes, but very pleasant in manner. This

was Stanton Ellery, a nephew and ward of the farmer's, and he also lived in the family.

For the next few days Billy was as busy taking notes of people and things, as he was industriously occupied with various new duties.

Mrs. Ellery would have overlooked his wardrobe had he had any to undergo that process; but when she found he owned only the tatters on his back, she soon had him decently clad, and gave him a brush, a comb, a Bible, and a room. What this last was to Billy she never imagined. It was only a low room, over half the kitchen, but when he knew it was to be his, he felt like a king. Over the bed, with its red and yellow calico spread, was a hanging shelf for curiosities, evidently, as there was a clam-shell there and a pigeon's wing. In the cherry-wood washstand was a drawer full of twine and nails. There was a table—not so very rickety—and on it a pile of illustrated

papers. That looked as if some time he might sit there and read. At the window a "turkey-red" curtain let in a rosy light, and to Billy the place seemed richly furnished.

Mrs. Ellery gave him also several articles to be worn for a change, and on Sunday. These were regarded by Billy with great pride, as they hung on pegs inside the door.

Yes, life had indeed begun for the boy; he was "planted," and ready to "take root."

Farmer Ellery was very prompt and active himself; and Billy, studying him, had concluded that he was "smart;" when about the end of the week, this impression was, for the time, obliterated. Billy considered himself a pretty good judge of horse flesh, and he had attended some horse sales, very well managed, as he thought. Now Mr. Ellery had a horse that was the object of Billy's secret scorn, and perhaps with reason. Bob was one day tied to the hitching-post

by the back gate, and Billy was near by, mending a wheelbarrow. Meanwhile a man came along, and leaning on the gate, asked, "Where's the boss."

"Down in the south lot."

"Do you know if he wants to sell that critter?"

"I don't believe he'd like to part with it—old Bob's a staver."

"Good for anything?"

"Good! When his grit is up he can pass any trotter on the road. He was an old pacer, Bob was; now to be sure Mr. Ellery just keeps him for steady work—he don't mind how much he does or how little either," muttered Billy, driving a nail into the barrow furiously.

"He looks like a galvanized old hoop petticoat," grunted the stranger, poking Bob's ribbed sides.

"If he was lazier he'd be fatter," returned Billy.

“Well, I aint looking for a beast to drive in Central Park.”

“If you was you might go farther and do worse, so far as some points are concerned,” said Billy, dropping the hammer, and letting himself loose, so to speak, on the inquiring stranger, who was greatly amused and a little bit moved by Billy’s evident knowledge of horse talk, if not of horse flesh. He was not at all sure but that Bob was the horse for him, if a tenth of what this shrewd faced boy said was true. Ellery was renowned for his honesty, and his boy could have had no instruction about selling a horse not for sale.

“Go find your father. I want another critter for farm work, and maybe this old plug will do, if he wants to get rid of him.”

Billy started, but at that moment Mr. Ellery himself came up a lane and advanced toward them, in response to the man’s loud, “Hello, friend! what’ll you take for this horse?”

"What will you give?"

"That depends. What sort of an animal is it?"

"One to be relied on. He never does anything unexpected."

"What is he good for?"

"He is the best eater you ever saw."

"That doesn't fat him up any."

"No," replied the farmer, eyeing Bob as dispassionately as possible.

"Is he fast?"

"He can jog along for an hour or two, and then you can't get him off a walk to save your life."

"I see you don't want to sell him, so you tell the truth about him."

"I'd like to sell him. He's not worthless, by any means; but I don't need him. There is work in him yet," said Mr. Ellery, proceeding to point out all the capabilities of that sort that Bob possessed, but to Billy's disgust as calmly telling wherein he was not sound.

The upshot of the matter was the stranger bought the old horse for twenty-seven dollars. Billy was sure he, in Mr. Ellery's place, could have sold him for seventy-five, and very likely he might have done so. When the bargain was concluded, the two men walked away to the barn, the stranger turning back once to glance at Billy.

That night, after supper, as Billy sat on the back door steps playing with Zip, the big dog, Mr. Ellery came out and sat near by, in his large wooden chair.

"You would make a sharper horse-dealer than I am, Billy."

It did not seem exactly modest for the boy to say, "That's so," but all the same, he said it to himself.

"When you offered yourself, over the fence, to me, that morning, why didn't you tell me you could do more than any man for ten miles around here, so far as farm work went?"

“What did I want to lie for?” returned Billy, indignantly; “besides,” he added, “you’d a found me out and sent me back where I came from.”

“What did you want to lie so for to that man, about Bob, then?”

“Why, I was sellin’ a horse!”

“And after the man had him, you knew he couldn’t send him back.”

Surprise filled Billy’s face; then, in the clear light of the man’s eyes—this man, who gazed at him so earnestly—Billy answered honestly, “Yes, I’d a had him then, fast;” but his voice faltered.

“I never sell horses, or anything else, in that way, my boy; and I don’t want you to do it. If forty-nine men out of fifty like that sort of dealings, I don’t. You must not begin, if you live here. If I had asked fifty dollars for Bob, I should have known I was selling him for his worth, which is just about twenty-seven, and I was selling out my self

respect, say for ten more, my truthfulness for ten more, my good name for three dollars more ; and the devil would have cheated me worse than I had cheated Bob's new owner."

"I thought folks always lied when they sold horses," put in Billy, feebly.

"Most everybody does ; but that is no reason why you and I should."

This was a new idea to Billy ; he mused on it, not seeing Mr. Ellery when he went back into the kitchen.

By-and-by he heard a chuckle, and looking up, he saw young Ellery drawing on his kid gloves, preparatory to going into the town. A being who wore gloves was so far removed from our boy, that he was peculiarly pleased to receive a not unfriendly dig in the ribs from a kidded paw, with the remark, "You'll do, youngster ! The stuff is in you. I'd bet you against Uncle Tom, on a horse trade, any day."

"He could have got more, just as easy as

not ; that fellow was a kind of a greeny."

"Of course," quoth young Stanton, sauntering off.

"I guess I'll go down and see granny," thought Billy, after a while ; and as he crossed the fields toward the cabin, he was saying to himself, gravely : "A man must get more money when he is sharp, but people that see and tell things exactly as they are, make a body like them to fall back on. Ben wasn't smart a bit, but he seemed kind of wise, and he would tell the truth always. I didn't suppose men ever were like that. I thought it was because Ben did not know any better. Perhaps it is the very best anybody can do to just go it on the square every time. I might try it."

CHAPTER V.

PRISSY TARBOX.

BILLY opened the cottage door and stood a second motionless, so surprised was he by the change that had taken place there. A new rag carpet, with a great deal of green and yellow in it, made the floor soft as the grass outside. A small stove shone like satin, and the old lounge had been restuffed and covered with red calico. In the middle of the room stood Prissy Tarbox, and she spoke her welcome thus :

“ Young man, you can come to see granny whenever you like, but please to remember I like to have folks knock. Death is about the only caller now-a-days uncivil enough to en-

ter without as much as sayin', 'by your leave.' "

"I'll knock next time," said Billy, meekly; and then Prissy, mollified, exclaimed: "See there now, don't she look like a new pin?"

"Why didn't you get here to supper?" asked granny, as Billy, following Prissy's motion, went over to the cosiest corner of the room.

"Why, she is real handsome, isn't she?" laughed the boy. "What have you done to her?"

"I've mended her all up," returned Prissy, as if she talked of a jointed doll. "Her hair is soft as silk, and in two little puffs, looking like a picture under her clean cap. That knit shawl I gave her myself, and the slippers. She is as happy as the day is long, now, Billy, and if you drop out a dozen or two years, she is pretty bright. I know everything that has happened in this neigh-

borhood for about twenty years back, so she's more entertaining to me than if she was a later edition, as you might say."

The old lady patted Billy's rough head and smiled up at the trim, alert little seamstress, to whom Billy was artfully remarking, "You don't look a bit over twenty."

"I be—I'm twenty-seven; but I began to be knowing early as a youngster. Granny is a great deal clearer in her mind, now that her meals are more regular. The poor old creature needed cossetting; if she gets hungry she gets lunny; but now I keep a little warm broth on the stove, and she takes a sup now and then. She is just as good company as I'd ask. Besides she is a regular illuminated text, as pious as anybody could desire. Well now, Billy, how does it go with you?"

Billy chatted away for some time about his new home, while granny listened almost intelligently, and Prissy with evident curiosi-

ty. When Billy avowed he liked every member of the Ellery family, the latter remarked:

“Mrs. Ellery is a prime housekeeper, and he is so honest I’ve heard folks say he must be crazy. If they don’t go so far as that, they say he’s very original. That’s ’cause he just up and tells the truth on all occasions. There’s nothing more unexpected, you know, than truth, or you will know it if you live long enough. Si Barnard works up there, don’t he?”

Prissy’s last words were uttered with such marked unconcern that Billy might not have replied, if Silas Barnard had not become somewhat of a favorite with him.

“Yes, Si works there the year round. He’s a clever fellow, isn’t he?”

“Too clever—there’s no snap to him,” said Prissy indifferently, and adding, “he is good-natured; so much so, some folks say he is soft; he is handy about most everything

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and can sing very well ; plays the fiddle tolerably. Pa used to say fiddlin' singin' men folks never were anything but poor sticks."

"Si works hard," said Billy.

"Oh, I suppose so ; it is neighborly in him to come over and milk Brownie for us every day. I can milk, but I don't like to do it."

"He needn't do that any more ; that's my business, only I never thought of it."

Prissy did not look as satisfied with this suggestion as she might have been ; perhaps she was thinking of Billy's interests, for she remarked, "Maybe Mr. Ellery wont like you running here too much to wait on us. I suppose Si's time is his own, after hours."

"Oh, I can come as well as not."

Prissy fell into a brown study, with her plump hands folded over her neat pink calico dress. She was as bright and attractive as any young girl. The kitten, whose once lean sides had grown full and sleek of late, popped up into granny's lap. The old lady

began to sing to her, as if she were a baby, and pussy, in return, purred in loud content.

“Once on the stormy seas I rode,”

Was granny’s favorite hymn ; and while her weak old voice quavered up and down, Billy wondered if the ocean that “yawned,” and the “bark,” that so “rudely tossed,” were really pictures of her actual experience. He asked Prissy, and she quickly returned :

“O no, the hymn goes that way ; though she’s had a rough enough life, I’ll warrant.”

“So have I,” said Billy, with the tone of a pilgrim full of years and adventures.

“You ! What do you know about life ?”

“Well, I rode a canal mule once five months. I washed dishes two days in a city boarding-house. I had a boot-blackening stand once in front of a cigar store, with a chair for my men right under the Indian queen, with her nose knocked off. That was the grandest time of my life. I made

enough to buy my grub regular, and go to a show every Saturday night."

"I wonder you did not go to the old Nick—or the House of Refuge," said Prissy, looking him well over, as if she fancied he might have been more mysteriously vicious than appeared.

"I should have done just that if I had not had a bringing up."

"A bringing up! Well, how far—pray tell?"

"Till my mother died," was the boy's half sullen answer. Prissy was quick enough to see that he was right. The poor mother started Billy toward the highest good she knew; and on her memory, as on a support, had crept up little tendrils of good thinking, of better doing.

"What are you going to do when you are a man?" she asked, approvingly.

"I am going to earn money enough for a tall white marble stone with a beautiful

image on top—I've seen 'em in graveyards—I'll have one on her grave, and besides I'll keep always there one of these—these—sort of bright stiff flowers in a hoop you know, that never fades. I like the gold colored ones best. I asked the price of 'em once, but I couldn't pay for it."

"Everlasting wreaths, they call them," exclaimed Prissy.

Granny stopped stroking pussy and gazed at the talkers a minute, whispering solemnly: "And they sing the song of Moses—the song of the Lamb, saying, 'Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints!'"

"What is she talking about, do you suppose?"

"About heaven, Billy, where your mother is."

"Is that all pretty talk, or do you really believe my mother is somewhere this very

night?" and asking the question vehemently, Billy's wide open eyes watched through the window the tree shadows moving in the moonlight back and forth over the crisp grass.

Prissy, somewhat startled, hesitated a moment, then answered :

" I believe it, and I am not very good. I've got principles, of course, but I ain't real pious. Granny is very pious, and always was. Folks like her seem to know there's a heaven, and that all good mothers are there after they die."

" I hope mine has got over her backache, and that there is so much to eat she won't be going without any meals and giving hers to anybody's children. It makes me mad yet to think when she must have been as hungry as I was, those days, sometimes I did eat more'n my share," murmured Billy, swallowing a sob.

" Oh, you was a poor, little, starving

shaver, and it did her more good to see you filled than to have it herself. That's all past now, forever, and she is wearing diamonds and pearls, and outshining Queen Victoria, maybe."

"I wouldn't like her so. If she is like that, she's forgotten me."

"Nonsense! And maybe," added kindly Prissy, resolved to have it perfectly satisfactory, "maybe they can leave off everything except their lovely white robes, if they prefer; probably your mother would be quiet in her taste. I only meant diamonds were nothing up there."

Billy no more questioned her information than if she had but just returned from a visit to the Celestial city. He listened to her next remark with new interest; but, in the midst of a sentence, there came a rap on the door, and Prissy rushed around to light a lamp before opening to the new comer. It proved to be Silas Barnard, who hitched

along in rather shyly, and was speechless, when Billy broke out:

“Why, you don’t let Brownie go till this time of night, do you, before you milk her?”

“Hush up; Brownie was milked hours ago,” put in Prissy, offering Silas a chair, and saying: “I suppose you dropped in for that basket Mrs. Ellery sent me those house plants in. I am ashamed I kept it so long.”

“My sakes, Si, I could have fetched that home any time; you must be awful particular,” commented Billy, with the harrowing thick-headedness of a boy who has never known a sentimental emotion. However, a little later, he refrained from saying openly that Silas made things stupid, but thinking just this, he frolicked with the cat, talked a little with granny, and then started for home. First, however, without a thought of cruelty, he lingered on the threshold to say:

“Coming now, Si? If you’ll go around

by the clearing, I'll show you that trap I told you about."

Si was not going. He blushed a little, and squirmed more. Prissy began to tell an endless and rather, for her, dull story. Billy getting tired, finally took himself off.

It was a fine evening, and not at all late, so Billy loitered along, listening to the frogs, and, after a while, thinking about Stan Ellery. What an easy life the young fellow had. Si said he was coming into a fortune when he was of age. He had plenty of money now, and more liberty than the farmer thought good for him. He owned his pony. He had an off-hand, friendly manner that everybody seemed to admire. Yes, Stan had a fine start. "But, then," said Billy to himself, "suppose he has, now; twenty years from this time, if I have made my 'pile,' won't I be as well off as he is? Many a poor boy has made a rich man.

Mr. Ellery says he never had a cent left him; he earned all he has."

Billy was turning it over in his mind how he was to attain to wealth, when he reached home, and mounted the back stairs to his room. He sat down by the open window, where soon the sound of voices reached him plainly. Mrs. Ellery, Nan, and the farmer were talking on a piazza not far below, and at one side from his window.

"I think Stan's father made a great mistake in insisting that he should be educated, at first, by private tutors. Steady drill with other boys, regular discipline, and no flattery or undue favor, is what he needs," said Mr. Ellery.

"When I have learned all I can learn at the red school-house — what then?" interrupted lively Nan.

"Then," said her father, calmly, "you will not tell me, as you did tell me yesterday, that verbs have gender, and that 'ellar-

boret' is a correct way to spell 'elaborate.' ”

“That was only a slip of my tongue, pa. But, tell me, do, am I ever going to any other school?”

“You are going to have the most thorough education I can give you, to fit you for the best life you can live.”

“Billy don't know anything!” exclaimed Nan, suddenly.

The boy at the window could almost see Nan toss her long braid and fling up her chin, as she made this rash statement, which angered him not a little.

“Indeed you are mistaken. Billy is very knowing, as I find,” remarked her mother.

“Well, I mean about reading. He learned all he knows off city bill-heads and signs, so he told Si.”

“You might teach him to read well, Nan.”

“I would not like to—he hasn't any manners.”

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"I don't suppose the heathen have any good manners, but there are folks who do missionary work among them, sometimes," was her father's quiet reply.

If Nan had any further remarks to make, Billy did not hear them. He was decidedly "stirred up." To be despised by a girl was something, it seemed to him, he would not, and could not endure. To have this particular black-eyed Nan object to teaching him anything! He longed to pound her with spelling-books until she was black and blue. As if he would have learned anything of her, any way! He could read. Had he not, many a time, read for granny, when Ben could not do so? Just here Billy reflected that, when the old lady's wits were clearest, she had repeatedly objected to the names he often gave Bible characters, and even to the words he put into their mouths. Perhaps he did not know much, after all. Very well, then, he would know more. No Nan Ellery

should turn up her nose at him. "It turned up anyway," he muttered, as he arose and went spitefully to pulling about the bed-clothes.

He was kept awake from mental excitement the first time in his life that night; he had received so many ideas that were new to him in the day time. A man actually had sold a horse for a small sum in preference to lying and getting a larger amount. Then Prissy had given him a thought of a mother away from earth, but his mother still. In that thought was far-off purity; something white and sweet, that drew him on and up a little. While he was saying to himself that he must be rich some day, it came to him with force that he ought to know something in his head, as well as to have something in his pocket-book. He tumbled and tossed, and fell asleep at last, and dreamed that Nan Ellery was sitting on the red school-house chimney, making faces at him, while he was

hunting for something to throw at her. Very ignorant and impulsive was this nobody's boy, but he was waking to realities. Life never again could be merely a minstrel show, even in his simple estimation.

CHAPTER VI.

A PURIFICATION.

IN the summer months that followed Billy's entrance into the Ellery family, he learned more than in all his life previous as a vagabond. He was of course too young and too inexperienced to be put at any one long task involving much thought or responsibility, but the farmer gave him plenty to do; and after explaining all the whys and wherefores, he required Billy to be faithful and industrious. Frequently he had some work to do for Mrs. Ellery, and she taught him to be careful and neat. He strained the milk and helped her churn. On rare occasions he washed dishes, but always with a secret protest, because that was properly Nan's work, and her saucy

black eyes were usually full of fun at the awkward dabs he made into the hot water. Nan would have been astonished to know how Billy felt towards her about this time. A week or so after that night, when he had heard her say he knew almost nothing, she found a spelling-book, a second reader, and the First Lessons in Grammar. Armed with these, and upheld with a virtuous desire to do "missionary work," Nan one day walked out on the piazza where the boy sat mending a horse-net, and said, "You can't read very well, can you, Billy?"

"Not so well as usual," he replied, waxing a length of twine with a big lump of beeswax.

"As usual?" repeated Nan, somewhat puzzled.

"Well, then, not so well as before I went up in that balloon and concussed my brain as I lit," continued Billy, with such an air of intelligent sobriety, that Nan asked quickly,

"Why, did it burst your brains?"

"Awfully. I was 'most ready to enter college before that. I talked Latin easier than nothing; but going up so suddenly as I did, and coming down suddener, was a kind of a shock to a fellow who couldn't spread any wings to save his life. It gave me softening of the brain."

"I thought that ailed you," said Nan, just as sedately; "but I supposed you didn't know what the cause was. I was just going to offer to teach you any lesson you wanted to learn. Mother thought you ought not to stay so ignorant."

"'Tisn't painful, a bit," said saucy Billy; "and likely as not all my old education will come back, some day." Then he could not resist a provoking grin, as he glanced up at the trim little would-be teacher.

Nan's dignity was so much offended that she exclaimed severely: "Do you intend to grow up without knowing anything?"

"No marm."

“Do you want me to teach you anything?”

Alas for the cause of education, the “good-little-girl,” tone of Nan’s voice rasped Billy’s already irritated temper, and he doggedly returned :

“No, I don’t want anything of you.”

“Well, you are the most ill-mannered boy I ever saw ; and I don’t know what father took you for, I’m sure. I wouldn’t teach you now if you teased me ever so hard,” returned Nan, her voice loud and sharp with anger. She stood a second after saying that, as if she were tempted to add something more. Then hearing her mother calling her she turned away hastily.

For a moment Billy’s revenge was pleasant : a girl had despised him, and he had made her “hopping mad.” And as he went on mending his net, his face grew very red, for slowly and surely he realized that he had acted like a “jackanapes.” He did not

know much, and Nan only saw the truth. It was kind in her father to tell her to help him, and kind in her to be willing to do so, after she thought about it, as she evidently had thought.

It seemed horrid to have to be the victim of kindness, but if he had been singled out for her effort in that way, even his untutored sense told him he should have either accepted or refused the offered help, in at least a decently civil manner. It never occurred to him to apologize for his rudeness—far from it; but a certain loss of respect made him sullen all the rest of the day. Several times before night the old lawless desire returned to Billy to strike off and commit some folly. Once or twice he looked down the pleasant country road that passed the house, and wondered how it would seem to be starting away, nobody knew where, to seek his fortune. Of old, when such a mood possessed the boy he followed it; but it was well for him that he

had wit enough now to reason that a good home, and honest work, was a present fortune for a nobody's boy.

Silas Barnard was a help to him in times like these. Billy would often talk freely with him and get much homely, sensible advice in return. Si was, also, very kind to granny, and to Miss Tarbox. He continued to milk their cow evenings, and he often staid later to render them any little service; but Billy was sent to milk in the morning. This evening, when Billy was not so well inclined as usual, he looked for Silas to return and divert him by playing the fiddle; but Silas staid at the cottage until after eight o'clock. About that time Billy went to the old well for a drink, and there encountered Stanton Ellery. The boys had a notion that, in warm weather, the water drawn up in the old-fashioned bucket was cooler than that from the modern pump nearer the house. Billy, in particular, liked to come to this spot,

for a huge tree overshadowed it, and on the wooden platform, now moss-covered, he could sit with Si Barnard, when the latter felt like fiddling.

"I suppose you did not have a well like this on every corner of New York streets, did you, Bill?" exclaimed Stanton.

"Havn't you ever been in the city?"

"Oh, dozens of times. It is the only place to live. The country was made for cattle. By-and-by, when I get enough of books to suit Uncle Tom, I'll get out of this old pasture-land. What did you see that was lively in your time, Billy? Didn't you say you washed whiskey glasses in a concert saloon, once?"

"Yes, I did it for a week. Bob Phipps had the place, but a truck run over him, and his boss offered me my grub to be there nights. It was mighty poor grub, though, on the free lunch order, you know; and the show just wasn't worth the late hours. I

lodged in a dry-goods box in the Bowery about those times, and if I had tried to sleep days, you know, somebody would have been overhauling my bed-room, as likely as not; so I retired from the trade."

As Billy talked, he had wound up the dripping, creaking bucket, and was refreshing himself from the half shell of a cocoanut that hung close by the well. Then he turned away to go to bed.

"Sit down awhile, young chap, and let me put you through your paces," said Stanton, in his lazy, good-natured way.

Billy dropped on the dry grass, and the boys continued to talk of city scenes in low life. He began by telling Stanton of that which seemed to him the most entertaining: of great down-town fires; of the thrilling escapes of the firemen; of military parades; of a certain strike, and a lively mob that discomfited the police. But young Ellery was not greatly interested. He questioned

him of other things, that had already begun to drop out of the boy's thoughts.

Under exactly the same circumstances, and after the same training, Stanton Ellery would have betrayed coarser instincts than Billy Knox. Stanton's life had passed in pure, sweet, country scenes. He had walked through woods, and had never seen a wild-flower, or cared a straw whether or not birds sang, or tall ferns waved, or that curious little insects and animals were all around him. But he never heard a low joke at the town grocery which he did not remember. Billy Knox had met a great deal of wickedness, had seen and heard bad things, because they were where he had been; but it was as true of him figuratively as it was literally, that, when he came to filth, he had walked around it, instead of turning it over curiously.

To-night, as the two boys sat in the faint star-light, under the shade of the black tree, Billy could not fail soon to perceive, that

what his soft-mannered, white-handed companion wanted, was to have him tell him, in detail, of the most vulgar scenes, the smuttiest, slimiest places he knew. It was somewhat awkward for Billy at first, because the worst of his old street companions had not taxed him to make himself agreeable in this fashion, ever before. They knew as much as he knew, but what they wanted to know, as a rule, was something amusing, or even helpful. However, when Billy saw that the lower his allusions were, and the viler his stories became, the more excessively did they amuse Stanton Ellery—who was he, that he should be fastidious? Whatever he did, he did with all his might; and now he racked his memory for material wherewith to edify his listener, who, by exciting questions would lead him on, or by appreciation expressed in his long, low, musical laughter, would flatter Billy's self-conceit. They sat there an hour; then Stanton, finding that

Billy had apparently exhausted his resources, rose up, yawned, and sauntered off toward the house, remarking :

“ Well ! Well, my little red herring, you are pretty well salted. You’ll keep ! I always knew you couldn’t be so fresh as you seemed.”

A moment after Stanton had gone, Billy thought he heard a step behind the well-sweep. He turned quickly, but it was too dark to see any distance. It was late, too, and time for all the doors to be locked. That was Si’s business, and Si had returned, for the light from his lantern could now be seen glimmering through the barn door. Billy wished he need not go to bed ; he was not at all sleepy. He would like Silas to fiddle his liveliest dancing-tunes. He sprang up, and had gone about a rod, when a man pounced down, and gripping him by the shoulder, exclaimed :

“ I want you in the barn !”

“Well, land, Si! You needn’t wring a fellow’s neck off, if you do. I can take an invitation easier than that,” returned Billy; adding: “What’s up? A cow choking again?” as Silas strode away toward the lantern and the open barn door.

Billy followed fast, into a little room where Si kept his tools, carriage grease and old clothes. He went nearer, as the man opened a little keg and looked grimly in, then searched and found a cloth.

“What is it, Si?” he asked, again.

“It is this,” said Silas, sternly; and turning, he clutched Billy in two powerful hands that held him firmly: “I have stood by that ’ere well for half an hour, and I feel as if my nose was full of a stench that come from some bottomless pit. Now, Billy Knox, I hain’t got no call to attend to Stanton Ellery. He is a gentlemanly young cuss, that bids fair to be a gentlemanly devil one of these days; but I am amazed at you. It seemed to me to-

night, that you must be rotten through and through. Fust off, I was of as good a mind as ever I had to eat, to go fetch the boss, and let him send you flyin'; but I held on a little longer, seein' as how Stan was egg'in' you on, and I've concluded to give you a chance — one more chance — for decency. But I hope, for gracious sake, you threw up all the horrible stuff there is in you. I've got a thing or two to say, after I've cleaned your mouth out so you'll be fit to speak to the rest of the family in the morning."

Thus saying, and quicker than a wink, Si Barnard had Billy's red head under his shirt sleeve, and into Billy's mouth, opened to roar, had gone a swab of soft-soap that did good execution. Up, down, and around his gums, and into his cheeks went brown chunks of the strong dark substance. The frantically kicking heels behind, upset a peck measure of meal, a pail of water, and waved wildly in the air like banners of distress. Si

was emphatically at the head of this undertaking, and cared for nothing in the rear. He soaped and scrubbed the spitting, spluttering mouth, in a way no boy would forget to his dying day; then he suddenly dumped Billy on a bran chest, and went out, locking the small room door.

“I will be back soon, when I’ve done a chore or two. You’ll get your breath by that time, and can listen to me.”

Silas’ voice was so void of all temper, so full of self-control, that Billy was for a moment or so surprised at himself that he was not madder at the treatment he had received. A little water remained in a pail not overturned, and dipping up this as best he could, he removed the soap clinging to his teeth; but the process was far from agreeable.

By-and-by Si returned, set down the lantern by his feet, and perched himself on a barrel top, from which position he silently

studied Billy, who began to feel a strange new emotion of shame.

“I know all about common animals,” calmly remarked Si, at last. I’ve seen and heard most of the wild beasts at one time or another, but to the best of my knowledge there aint but one brute among ’em all that seems to love pure filth because it is filth—and that one is the hog. He aint pretty—he looks like a hog, and aint got but one set of manners. He is for that very reason not in danger of doing much harm, because he is kept in his pen and not invited to sit at folks’ tables or to keep company with ’em. There is a human creature that is a great sight meaner and worse to have around than an honest out and out dirty beast. It is a boy or a man who can act like a gentleman, smooth nice ways, good grammar kind o’ talk before folks he’s afraid of—but when he get’s a chance, down he goes rootin’ in the mire—spattering everybody and everything,

soilin' everything he touches ; callin' after him some little wretch like you that has just been set onto your pegs in a clean spot. I'm ashamed of you, Billy Knox !"

"Havn't done nothing much—only talk-ed. You must be green, Si, if you never heard folks go on sort of free and easy," muttered Billy, sullenly.

"Look up here, boy !"

Billy lifted his head. Si took the lantern, and holding it close to the boy's face, he leaned forward, saying : "Tell me the truth now. Do you like such kind o' talk ? Do you begin it when you are along with other boys ?"

"No, I don't ;" said Billy, firmly.

"Do you think much of such stuff ?"

"I forgot I'd ever seen or heard the most of that—that nonsense I had over to-night, until I got a going, Si," replied Billy, looking him full in the eyes with his own bright ones.

Si saw truth and shame both in the face

upturned to him. He put down the lantern, and said :

“ I’ll believe you until I find you fooling me, on the condition that this purifying you’ve had keeps your mouth clean hereafter. Do you suppose I’ll have you talk as you did to-night, and then go to the cottage visiting them good women there, breathin’ the same air with old granny, who looks as if she’d got one tired old foot right on the threshold of heaven, and her face half way in?—and—and Prissy too ! I think considerable of Prissy. I’d sooner turn a regular hog in on them, just as I said before, than a man made out of a boy like Stan Ellery. I’ve often noticed that a boy that had a real out and out nice, pretty sister, didn’t want no such foul talking boys around her. You ain’t never had any sister, had you, Billy ?”

“ No ; and I’m glad of it. I hate girls !”

“ And judgin’ from your talk to-night,” continued Si, with deliberate study of his

youthful listener's dogged countenance, "judgin' from that talk of your past, I suppose your mother must ha' been a low, vulgar-talking"—

Billy gave one bound, and landing about on Si's stomach, would have rolled him head-long off the reeling barrel; but perhaps Si expected to be bombarded, for he struggled good-naturedly, and cried out, "I take it all back, Billy. Maybe she wasn't"—

"She was the best woman that ever lived!" roared the boy. "She was ten thousand times better than any mother you ever had, Si Barnard! She"—

"I take it back, Billy, every word. There, stop prancin'; you'll break my lantern," urged Silas, adding, in a tone that quieted and moved Billy, "I know what a good mother is—but mine did not have a very good son. I loved her, God knows I did! but I made her no end of trouble. I run away from home against her wishes, 'cause I could

not live peaceable with my oldest brother and my father. I wouldn't come home when she used to write and tell me to come, but I always said to myself that I'd earn some money for a black silk dress (father was awful tight, and she never had a decent dress to her back); then soon as I could show 'em that I could take care of myself, I'd go home and take mother that there nice present. Wall, I got my steady work, and I got the dress, as sure as you live. It laid three weeks in my trunk before I could get leave of absence to take it to her. I used to look at it in that old hair cloth trunk, just as women folks look into cradles at their babies; but you see it sort of meant to me how I loved that poor weakly little woman who had had precious little comfort in life. One day I got a telegraph. Lor, how them yellow envelopes makes me shiver!—an' it said she was sick, dangerous. I didn't lose no time, but when I got there, they was asking what

they should lay her out in. I handed that black silk dress to the neighbor women, and my mother had it for her shroud. But I never got the chance, Billy, just to tell her I was an ungrateful wretch, but I did love her; I wanted to say that so much."

Si's mouth was twitching, and the soap seemed to have got into Billy's eyes.

"When a woman is good she is like my mother, and yours, maybe. She hates talk that is bad, and she hates mean, low thinking that don't get out in talk; and if a fellow wants his mother that way, he ought to be ashamed of himself if he wants to be what she despises. Aint that so, Billy?"

In the clear light of the lantern the boy's face had grown softer, and his really fine eyes looked frankly into Si's, as he replied: "Yes; only boys and men never are like—well, like"—

"They are strong, and loud, and bold, you mean, of course. That's the way they are

meant to be; but a turnip can be just as clean and wholesome as a rose, if it aint pretty enough for a flower-pot. You aint so fine and delicate as Nan Ellery, but you've no call to say what her father wouldn't have her hear for five thousand dollars. Aint you ashamed of this night's goings on?"

"Yes."

"Prove it, then, by letting it be the last such talk you ever let out. Prissy said you was asking her where she supposed your mother was, and kind of inquiring about heaven. I don't know many Bible verses for all sorts of things, as granny does, but here's one you try and remember. After almost everything had been said that the Lord himself meant to have said to us down here on earth, on the very last page of the Bible, he tells us who can get into heaven, and who must stay on the outside, and never 'enter in through the gates into that city.'"

“Who can’t go in?” asked Billy, slowly, after Silas stopped.

“Filthy people—not filthy bodies, but filthy souls! They are shut out; and the word will be—it says just this exactly: ‘He that is filthy, let him be filthy still.’”

For a little while after that neither the man nor the boy spoke. A rat gnawed away behind the meal bin, and not far off the horses were pounding their hoofs on the stable floor. Billy seemed to be gazing at a great cobweb, white with dust, hanging from a halter on the wall; but he was doing considerable thinking, and some repenting, making to his better self a good promise or two.

When Silas picked up the lantern and prepared to go, he followed him, saying: “I guess you’re sound, Si. I don’t suppose if it hadn’t been in me, Stan Ellery could have stirred it all up. But he”—

“He is no crony for you, and the less you have to do with him the better.”

Si locked up the barn, and Billy crept in the kitchen door and up to his little chamber. His mouth was sore, and his self-conceit was terribly cast down; but deep in his heart was the firm conviction that the rough "hired man," whose fists were like a blacksmith's, was a cleaner, better being than the elegant stripling who had idled away his time at the well with him.

CHAPTER VII.

BILLY PUTS AN ENEMY TO ROUT.

ABOUT a week after Billy had so uncivilly refused Nan's offer of help, he went over to the cabin to see his friends. Prissy was sewing in a chair just outside the door; and Billy, having upset her work-box, first picked up the scattered spools, and then exclaimed: "Think, Miss Prissy, of something you want me to do for you; because I want you to do something for me."

"That is right, boy! Don't you go asking favors if you don't expect to render favors. What is it you want?"

"I want to learn to read without blundering so awfully as now. I want to figure on the slate, and to—well, you know—I want to

learn the things I would have learned if I had gone to school. Mr. Ellery says I may go to school this winter, but I'll hate to go in without knowing anything."

"Exactly so, Billy! In these days poverty doesn't hinder anybody from getting some learning. Why, even Mrs. O'Goramor, the washerwoman, says her Patrick shall have a regular 'epidemic education;' and I'm sure he'll take it that way if he ever gets it at all, judging from what I've seen of him. Yes, Billy, you come over here"—

"Evenings?" suggested Billy.

"No, not evenings, for I'm likely to be interrupted," replied Prissy, hurriedly. "I'll attend to you any other time. I'll ask Si Barnard to see that you get time; then I'll find my old school-books and put you through. I taught school once in Newton, and boarded around. I wonder I aint as green as a verde antique Venus, with the sal-

eratus bread-stuff I was kept on. Will you study faithfully?"

"Yes, I will; no fooling, Prissy."

"And you'll do something for me?"

"Sure as you live."

"Then it is a bargain. You know I always went out dressmaking before I came to live with granny, but now I take my work all home here, to make and finish. I like this way: we are as cosey as kittens in a rag barrel; but there is one disadvantage. I don't like to go away on an errand and leave granny all alone. I can, but I worry. She might tumble down, or set herself on fire, or get hurt in some way. I don't often care to go away, for I get plenty of exercise around the house and yard; and for company, I have all the people who come and go for their work. Still, when I do want to leave granny for an hour or so, if you could stay around where you would have an eye on her, it would be a great accommodation."

Billy agreed to do this, at once. He had a variety of work, and some time to himself; besides, the cabin was so near he could bring a few of the tasks set for him by Mrs. Ellery, and do them here. Thus the matter of "knowing" something, was fairly undertaken. Prissy was a strict teacher, and Billy was very much in earnest. Nobody had ever called him stupid. Prissy soon privately considered him remarkably precocious. He had early trained himself to habits of observation. His first look at a word was a keen one, and ever after he could spell or pronounce that word. He liked arithmetic, and detested grammar; declaring to Prissy, that anybody talked just as well without knowing what a noun was, as after he had learned; but Prissy kept him at it all the same.

One day, after reciting his lessons, Billy told her Nan had offered to teach him. He also told how he had received her offer; not

because he was at all proud of his rudeness, now, but really because he would like to know in what light it appeared to another. Prissy had no hesitation about telling him that he ought to be ashamed of himself.

Billy seemed not particularly surprised at this verdict, but he added, coolly :

“Nan said I was the most ill-mannered boy she ever saw, and she didn’t know what her father took me for, anyway.”

“Why do you suppose he did take you?” asked Prissy.

“Why—to work for him.”

“You don’t earn your bread yet, for your work is here and there in bits,” returned Prissy, very kindly, but going on plainly.

“No, Billy, he didn’t take you for any help or good you could be to him at present ; he just took you for your own sake, to help you make something of yourself. If Nan offered to teach you, why, you can be pretty sure it

was not for any pleasure she was going to get out it."

"Then I'm mighty glad she isn't doing it," said Billy, stoutly, as he picked up his cap and started homeward.

It was a pleasant mid-summer afternoon; and as Billy was going up the lane towards the farm-house, he saw Mr. Ellery and his wife just starting for a drive to Sefton, the nearest town. While he was thinking what he would busy himself about, Mrs. Ellery called out:

"You can finish that work in the garden, Billy; and don't go far away from the house, for Nan is alone. The men are away in the north field, out of call, if she needed them, and there is a company of gypsy tramps down by the bend, I hear."

No sooner had Billy learned of the gypsies, than he resolved to make them a visit at his earliest leisure; but he promised Mrs. Ellery to "stay around," and went to weed-

ing in the garden. As he worked he began to wish that he could, in some off-hand sort of a fashion—not, of course, as if he really cared the least bit in the world to do it—render some service to Nan.

Before their little unpleasant talk, she had sent him on errands, once or twice, and, in a mildly patronizing way, approved of him when he did them well. Now she put turnip or potato on his plate at dinner, with the same indifferent and superior air with which she fed the cat and dog after dinner. It irritated Billy, but he had sense enough to see he could only “get even” with her by making her, in some faint way, under obligations to him. He racked his brains for an idea, until he was forced to give up that line of thought. Was it not a proof that Billy was a boy to the core of his heart, that, failing to think what he could do to conciliate Nan, he fell back on the suggestion that, at least, he might “scare her half out of her

wits;" for was she not left alone to his tender mercies? How to accomplish this last feat, in a very simple way, by means almost always at hand, occurred to him, and, when his weeding was nearly done, he resolved to go into the house very quietly.

Nan was crocheting a red shawl, sitting in the big cool kitchen alone. He could hear her sing, and could see her through the open window. He had just risen from his stooping posture when he discovered a rascally looking fellow, slouching along in the real tramp gait. He was making for the open door of the room where Nan was sitting. Billy darted away in the opposite direction, made a complete detour of the yard, and stopped, unperceived, at the pantry window. It was open, and not far from the ground. Dropping his shoes, Billy got in as softly as a cat, and immediately inserting his nose in the crack of the door letting into the kitchen, he watched proceedings there.

The moment the tramp framed himself in the outside doorway, Nan sprang up, letting her work drop to the floor, for his face was as sneaking and as ugly as a human face well could be. He asked for "the folks," and Nan hesitated so long before she stammered out that they were "all busy," that he probably suspected she was alone, and stepped boldly in, demanding "something to eat."

Billy saw Nan glance at the pantry, then evidently fear to do anything. She turned very white, and her voice shook as she said:

"The dinner is all cleared away, and there is nothing I can give you, now."

Her silver thimble had rolled on the floor; the rascal coolly swooped it up, and casting an evil eye around on the table, the dresser, and the mantel-piece, growled:

"I'm out of work and very poor. I must have something—a little money, miss"—

Billy took in the situation. The great

fraternity of lazy, cowardly wretches, who scare women and servants into giving them food in summers, and herd in the city Island Institutions all winter, was well-known to him of old. He instantly resolved, inasmuch as poor little Nan had been already scared out of her wits, to turn his ammunition on the new comer. He dived toward a certain shelf in the pantry, seized a well-made paper bag, such as grocers use, and pulled out his "jack-knife." He was back to the look-out in time to see the tramp start for a silver spoon-dish that had been left on the dresser. As the man approached her, Nan gave one terrified shriek for "Father! father!"

Now Billy's voice had begun to change, and on occasions, sounded like each and every instrument of a brass band: so, muffling his mouth a trifle, he effected at this crisis, a terrific bass, and roared:

"Two seconds to git, before I fire!"

Without pausing to know if it were man

or beast that bellowed, the tramp turned. There was a sharp click of steel as Billy's old knife snapped into its case—then, with a deafening noise, off went his pistol—or, his exploded paper bag !

Nan began on a succession of ear-splitting screeches. The tramp had pushed her half over a chair, in the bound he gave toward freedom and the back lane. Billy, prone on the pantry floor, was rolling and writhing in laughter at the success of his exploit. He had overturned a churn, and no end of tin pails, before Nan, white and breathless, came, half believing she would find her father shot by his own deadly weapon, though, at the very time, she was thinking with amazement, "Father is miles away, and the old shot-gun burst last year."

Billy, with a scarlet face, could only sit up, and point to the fragments of the paper bag, and then go off again in new peals of fun, as Nan, seeing the joke, added her merry voice

to his. They had to talk it all over in detail, when they were a little calmed: how the man was most likely one of the vagabonds from the gypsy encampment; how he had Nan's pretty thimble, a birthday gift; but chiefest of all, how queer it was that a mere blown up paper bag could make such an awful noise! In her girlish excitement, Nan declared it sounded "exactly like a cannon."

They picked up the pans and churn; then Nan, who had berries to look over for supper, graciously allowed Billy to help her, and evidently regarded him as a hero in an humble sort of a way. He, on his part, repeatedly assured himself, that he had put the bag to a far better use than that first suggested to him by the spirit of mischief. When the berries were nearly picked over, he managed to get out, rather awkwardly, the statement that he was learning "something," now. He "thought he wouldn't bother" her to teach him. Prissy Tarbox could do it as well as

not. Nan colored, then bravely exclaimed:

“It was mean in me to say I didn’t see what father took you for. He says you are a ‘real handy boy, and quick to understand work.’”

Billy was wonderfully pleased; but he began instantly to talk about Si Barnard and the black colt, for fear he should betray his bashful gratification. At this point Mr. and Mrs. Ellery drove up to the door, and before her mother had untied her bonnet strings, Nan was rehearsing the thrilling episode of the afternoon. Nan’s danger, or what Mrs. Ellery fancied might have been her danger, prevented her from entering as fully into the fun of Billy’s performance as did Mr. Ellery and Silas somewhat later; but on the whole it was a fortunate occurrence for the young people. Billy modified gradually his aversion to girls in general, because, after that day, Nan was very kind to him. She took an interest in his progress with Prissy; she

lent him Pilgrim's Progress, the Rollo Books and Robinson Crusoe. She had the true feminine tact of letting her opinions be known on certain matters about which she did not talk openly or in any pointed manner. It was little by little borne into Billy that he must keep his face, hands and nails cleaner; that "if you please," and "thank you," were agreeable words to say and to hear. In many such ways the home influence began to tell on him. He went to church and to Sabbath-school; he came to have some well-defined ideas of his relations to God and to man. As he proved himself capable and trustworthy, Mr. Ellery increased his work and made it more methodical than at first. The result was soon apparent in Billy's increased thoughtfulness regarding his future. He had a great many practical talks with Silas, and profited by advice like this: "What you want to do, Billy, for the next two years, is to learn—learn as fast and as

thorough as ever you can ; first, about work, and next about books. I missed it in getting no education. When my work was over I learned to fiddle, instead of to spell. I was a goose."

"What will I do after two years?" Billy would inquire, very seriously.

"Wall, that depends. If you have beat every scholar in the old red school-house, and want to go on to know more and be something else besides a farmer, then 'll be your time to try to get yourself through the Sefton Academy, may be to college. Who knows? But you needn't think a farmer like Mr. Ellery isn't worth forty 'leven gumps who go to college and come out too fine to work, too human to kill, but havin' to eat as much and wear as costly clothes as other folks."

"I expect I shall be a farmer," returned Billy. "Mr. Ellery says I can get on if I am plucky and do my best. First, of course, it

will be work by the day, at all sorts of farm work in the season; then in time I may get to work land on shares; small fields, he says, of various crops, such as corn, potatoes, beans, or I might, in time, become a market gardener."

"That's the talk! Why Ned Wait, on the Holcomb farm, raised barley last year and cleared a good round sum. Not long ago Mr. Bruce had a choice field, just right for growing hops, and he wanted a thorough-going active young man to work that on shares. He could sell the hops right off to the distilleries, and make it pay well. Oh, there's ways enough to work and get on in the world, Billy, if you do your best."

"You better believe I'll try it," was the boy's hopeful reply.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW SIGHT OF OLD THINGS.

MRS. ELLERY and Nan were very fond of Stanton. He never behaved disagreeably around the house, or said anything very unpleasant. The men about the farm were always too busy to render any sort of little services that the feminine part of the family could well do without; yet when Stan was ready to step in and proffer them, he seemed doubly agreeable. He often drove into town and left messages at the dressmaker's; he matched cloth for them. He cracked nuts and popped corn when Nan expected young girls to visit. He even staid home and helped them eat the nuts; and this, as he was entirely

out of "round-about," and, as he modestly let them know that he had eaten philopenas with young ladies recklessly and habitually, impressed the girls as being kindly courtesy. To his uncle he was always respectful, and, so far as was apparent, obedient. Mr. Ellery was far from approving of Stan, yet he could not bring anything worse against him than a lack of earnestness in his studies and a tendency to extravagance. Billy's opinion of Stan came to be a kind of compound sentiment. He vastly admired his easy air of assurance, which was just deferential enough not to make him appear conceited. He wondered at Stan's ability to give "neat" answers, which sheered clear of actual falsehood yet never implicated him, no matter how much he seemed at fault in any matter. Perhaps the chief attraction, after all, was his good nature. Si Barnard would scowl and mutter to himself about hypocrites, and then confess to Prissy that

the "fellow had a mighty taking way with him."

Billy for several months was flattered by the interest Stan seemed to take in hearing of his past life and adventures. He never presumed on his apparent friendliness and grew too familiar, but he contented himself with watching the young man—for so Stan wished to be considered. At first it was rather pleasing to Stan's conceit to have Billy take admiring recognition of everything he did or said, of where he went and when he returned. Not that Billy knew or saw half as much as he probably supposed was passing under his observation, but he was proving himself observant, shrewd, and able to read character. Gradually it was borne into Stan that Billy was a positive chap, who must be for or against him.

When Stan staid out nights until one or two o'clock, it was convenient to have Billy slip down the back stairs, and let him in.

Stan was sure Billy would do this for an indefinite length of time; but he was not sure, that if some day he were questioned, he would lie judiciously to screen him. Billy had, as Stan thought, an uncommonly horrid way of reckless truth-telling. Once, after Stan had ridden the farmer's best horse fast and furiously, forgetting to take proper care of it later, but meaning to keep the whole affair quiet, Billy had helped him very clumsily — telling no tales, but shirking the straightforward falsehood which Stan expected from him, as a good ally. Therefore, as the summer went by, Stan came to have his private opinion of the desirability of Billy's presence in his uncle's family, unless Billy could be made perfectly pliable in his hands.

He became, however, a great deal more gracious, and began to give the boy "something to read." Naturally, Billy's taste was rather poor in literary matters, and so in the

cheap books Stan brought him, he soon delighted. "Off to the Moon with a Madman," and "Sue Sykes; or, the Slaughter-House Demon"—dime novels with terrific pictures, were delightful in Billy's eyes, though some instinct made him read them on the sly. A pretty long course of such reading had its effect; only once Stan missed the mark. A far worse book than any of those trashy yarns, was thrust smilingly into Billy's hands one day, when the boys were for a moment alone together. An hour later, Stan, sitting by the old well whittling, looked up as Billy dropped something at his feet, saying:

"You didn't say what you gave it to me for, but I thought this was what it needed. Si would think so, I reckon, if I'd a showed it to him."

Stan stooped over, and recognized his book covered—yes, saturated with soft-soap. Billy never explained why he applied it, and

Stan never again alluded to the matter; but he muttered to himself:

“He’s inclined to be a goody chap, and everybody here will help him on. If he was smart he’d see I could teach him a trick or two worth knowing; as it is, I’m about sick of him.”

This being the case, one would have supposed that Stan would have ignored him after that, but he still lent him continually books of boys’ adventures; of wild life on the frontiers, of unnatural, yet to ignorant Billy, wonderfully fascinating exploits. In these books boys never submitted to do “chores” for their bread and butter; never lived with farmers for the mere sake of a home. O no! From driving mules, they attained by rapid, brilliant strokes of vaguely described genius, to the ownership of countless acres, where wild horses roamed; where savages existed only to fall before them, after vain strifes.

From the glaring frontispiece, to the advertisements on the back cover, Billy accepted all as literally true. Stan used to discuss the heroes and situations with him, as gravely as if the question was of some well-known scene in history. He did more than this: he labored to show Billy that the youths who lead these exciting lives were not naturally any "smarter" than was Billy himself. It was only that they had the pluck to put themselves in circumstances favorable to the development of their daring dispositions. For a long time Stan affected this apparently disinterested appreciation of Billy, and, after awhile, he was agreeably surprised to find his pupil had learned his lesson only too well.

One chilly evening in the early autumn, when, for a wonder, Stan Ellery was at home and in bed, Billy tapped on his chamber door, and whispered:

"I want to speak to you a minute."

“Come in, then—step softly; the sitting-room is just below,” returned Stan, who always suspected some motive for secrecy—a bad trait in anybody.

The room was dark, but Billy felt his hand along the wall until he reached the bed, and sat down by Stan’s feet.

“What’s up?” said Stan.

“I am.”

“So I see; but it isn’t late. I should be lively myself if I’d had more sleep last night. Heard anybody speak of the serenade a few fellows gave the girls down by the Bend, at Miss Crowfoot’s boarding-school? I believe the old maid poured hot water out of the window, at last, she got so enraged.”

“Si was telling about it. Somebody told Prissy. Were you”—

“I heard of it, sonny! That’s enough. Well, what are you up for?”

“I am going to light out, Stan!”

“Where are you going to, young man?”

"You see there is not the same reason now for my staying, that I thought there was in the first place. Granny is well cared for, and"—

"Exactly so, Billy; but what are you going to do?"

"I'm going first to New York. I've got the tin for that trip. When I get there, I'm going to hunt up four boys I know. Pete Hurdsen, the cutest chap ever you saw; he'd make his living off the sharp end of the North Pole. Ned Wilkes—he's little, but he isn't green—Sam Poole, and the Snipe, as we always called a fellow you could count on every time."

"When you've found them, what then?" asked Stan, out of the darkness, a laugh in his voice that Billy only took for sympathetic enjoyment of his enterprise in its first stage.

"Then we will start for Texas—or some such place. To be sure, I tried it once, but I didn't know how the thing was managed;

now I could do it, I know, as nice as a pin, as so could the others. We'll call ourselves a band, and have a name, you know."

"Of course," assented Stan; and if the room had been light, Billy would have seen the bed clothes shake. "Of course, go in and win! You're a chap!" What did Stan care what became of the "little fool," so he got him away from the farm?

"Everybody has been mighty good to me. I'd like to tell Si to tell"—

"As sure as you drop a word, Si will tie you to a post in the barn, or spank you, and that'll be as far on your way to Texas as you'll get," was Stan's quick reply.

Billy felt its force: he did not, however, confess that he had left a printed epistle in the barn, pinned to a wagon cushion, which, if it was ever deciphered, would throw some light on the path by which he had departed. He only added:

"I shall get over to the station in time for the early morning train. Good-bye."

"Success to you, old chap! you deserve it. Take my blessing, and my consent."

"He don't care a snap," was the rather sorrowful thought in Billy's mind, as he went out and shut the door. He certainly wished to get away silently, it was so put down in all the books; but it would have been pleasant to think somebody was a little sorry; for under his firm determination to "go and seek his fortune," Billy himself was very sorry to leave the farm. He steadfastly put all that out of his calculations at this time, and going back to his own little den, picked up his stick and bundle—he would not have taken a bag if he had owned one—opened wide the door, that, from the feeble light of a lamp below, he might take a last look, and started.

He went down the lane up which he had followed Peter's cow, that other night that

seemed so long ago, and stopped at the cottage. Not at the door; he went, instead, around to a little bedroom window, softly unfastened a rude shutter, and peered in. Everything was as he expected it would be. Prissy had left the little tin kerosene night-lamp burning, and by its light he could discover the old lady asleep, her hands peacefully clasped over her breast.

"She don't want many things; but Prissy can get something for her with it. Anyway, I never before could spare her a real present," muttered the boy, taking out of his pocket a silver half dollar rolled in blue tissue paper. He lifted the window softly, and aiming well, shot the coin not far from granny's wrinkled hands; then, more soberly than he had left Stan, he turned away from his first home. He reflected as he went that a boy who had a mother, certainly would never run away, if only to leave somebody

else's feeble old grandmother, made him so uncomfortable.

There was no need that he should hurry, so he turned back a little way, and creeping into an old tool-house belonging to the farm, he allowed himself a few winks of sleep; being sure his cramped position would prevent his losing too much time. The moon was up later, and about midnight Billy came out again, and tramped away toward the station, where would stop the earliest eastern train. When he reached it, the first streak of daylight had not yet appeared, and no one was moving but a surly baggage-man, who eyed him distrustfully. When he bought his ticket of the yawning agent within, the latter stared before he remarked, jocosely :

“Great press of business on hand, young man, that you are required to start for town so early?”

“Yes, stocks going up so fast I must be back in Wall Street,” was the prompt reply.

Already Billy felt more like a saucy gamin than for months. When the great headlight came near and nearer, and the train moved in, stopping only for a moment or two, Billy made a rush, and plunged into a smoky, foul-smelling car full of sleepy passengers. None roused out of their uncomfortable naps to look at the boy who dived into the one vacant seat by the water tank. He soon fell asleep, and did not awake until broad daylight, when they steamed into a covered depot, where a man was loudly proclaiming to the ringing of a big bell, that "Cars stop twenty minutes for breakfast."

Billy, mindful of the future, gave not a quarter of that time to his morning repast; and if he was once or twice also mindful of the past, in that the bountiful farm breakfast recurred to his thoughts, he assured himself that he had "roughed it once," and he must "learn to do it again."

It was just noon when the train ran into

the city, and Billy heard again the old familiar cries, and saw the old landmarks, as he worked his way down town. The life and bustle of the streets excited him; he wondered then, while the sun shone and a particularly good strolling band played "Yankee Doodle"—he wondered that he could ever have left New York. It almost seemed as if he never had been away—as if Ellery farm and the little cabin, where Ben once lived, had all been something he dreamed of. He amused himself with whatever passed under his eyes for a while; then he remembered that about five o'clock a wagon load of evening papers arrived at a certain point on the Sixth Avenue, and that several of his old cronies used to supply themselves then and there with papers for sale. If they had retired from that branch of the trade, some of the rest of the fraternity might put him on their track. Sure enough, when Billy was within half a block of the place,

the news cart came tearing past, and soon the papers were flying all abroad, and scores of boys were grabbing, running, yelling in all directions.

“By the cut of his jib I should vow that was Pete Hurdsen!” said Billy, “if he warnt so all-killing long-legged; but then, bless me, Pete’s legs ought to have grown since I saw them last.”

He broke into a run and chased the fast fleeing legs aforementioned, until Pete—for it proved to be he—stopped to make change for an old gentleman buying a paper. He would have escaped Billy then had the latter been less nimble. As it was, he stared blankly a second at the well-dressed boy, who caught him by the arm, exclaiming: “Hello, Pete! don’t you know me, old fellow?”

“Hello—why, is it you, Billy?”

“Guessed it the first go—stand back here, the papers ’ll keep.” And as Billy spoke

he drew Pete out of the crowd into a quiet corner of Jefferson Market. Pete yielded, but as he glanced over Billy's decent attire, he remarked, with a slight sneer,

"Cash, are ye?"

"No siree. I havn't been in the city for a good deal more than a year."

"Honest Ingin?"

"True as you live. I've had all sorts of luck—been on a farm lately."

"I'd like that. What did you quit for—lick you, mebbe?"

"Never. I'll tell you by-an'-by. Where is Tommy Boole, and the Snipe, and Ned Wilkes?"

"Ned's gone back to shines; he's got a chair and all the fixings down by Bleecker near Broadway. Tom's at papers by Grand Street Ferry, and—why, didn't you hear about the Snipe?"

"Of course not. I don't take a daily paper," returned Billy, ironically.

“Wall, now, he did get into the papers, a hull line to hisself: ‘Boy busted—pieces picked up and toted off to the Island.’ I reckon it said that, anyway. The Snipe was run over by a steam fire-engine. They popped him into a nambulance and rushed him off with a big bell a ringin’. My! wouldn’t he a liked the racket if he hadn’t been like dead, so they said he was, with the blood tricklin’ out of his mouth! Tommy and I got a permit to go and see him one day, and there he was a dying in style. Nice white bed clothes as ye ever see in a shop winder, and a ’ospital nurse in a ruffled muslin bonnet, feeding him jilly. He was mighty glad to see us, but he seemed that tired he couldn’t move. It was just as well he didn’t want to, ’cause his legs was both arcutaked.”

“What?”

“Cut off, I do believe that woman meant by what she said, for the bed clothes was all

flat—mashed like, no room for his legs below his knees there. But I didn't ask—I couldn't sort o', you know."

"Of course—poor Snipe!" echoed Billy, his sharp eyes dimmer.

Pete's pinched face was very grave. He watched a car horse stumble and regain its footing; then he added: "Folks do get around on stumps, but he'll never be that sort of a beggar. A fellow in the 'ospital hall they called a norderly, he said he'd die, because his inside works was all some way crushed. He sent his love to all the boys. His face was white as paper, and clean; his hair was combed, and looked curly, like a baby's, and he had a posy and greens pinned right on his shirt—(that was white)."

Pete stopped for a keen glance at Billy. Evidently this report was not being given unfeelingly, but if his hearer was not with him, he was done. Billy's sympathy was expressed in a franker, cleaner face than

Pete had ever seen in him before, so he went on. "He was kind o' like a baby, anyway; for when we come away he reached out his paw, and pulled us over, and kissed us both."

No—Billy did not laugh, he only winked hard while Pete looked off a minute over the elevated road to the long stretch of blue sky, adding, under his breath, "I suppose he went up for sure, after that, some day."

"Where do you put up?" asked Billy, swallowing something.

"Oh, lodgin' 'ouse, mostly; but tell what you've been up to yourself, can't ye?"

"Yes, by-an'-by. Give us half your papers. I'll sell 'em for you, and we'll meet at Twenty-first street, then I'll go down with you for the night."

How natural it seemed to our boy, who yesterday was on a quiet farm, to rush now like a winged imp up the Avenue, yelling: "Tel-e-gram! Tel-e-gram! Even'n' Post!" He espied a man on a door step, who

looked toward him ; he shot through the car that halted before Macy's : he rejoined Pete in excellent spirits. Somewhat later he had greeted several old associates, and visited an old haunt or two ; but even before midnight a change came over the spirit of Billy's waking dreams. The gay, noisy old city of the afternoon lost some of its charms. The summer heat had not died out here, as in the fresh country. The old eating-house, which Billy patronized when the tide of his fortunes ran particularly high (and where this night he took Pete for a treat), the place was horribly close ; and the stench of stale tobacco, garlic, beer, cabbage, and unclean guests, and their garments, actually turned his stomach. He said he was not hungry ; and saw Pete devour his share with secret disgust. At the lodging-house it was even worse. While at Farmer Ellery's he had enjoyed and gradually become accustomed to exquisite neatness, without even being conscious of it.

As a fact, Mrs. Ellery's cooking was perfection; her kitchen was spotless; while Mr. Ellery's barns were in almost as good order as were her rooms; and what was true of the farm, was equally true of Prissy's smaller domain. - The cabin was as sweet and clean as pure air, soap and water could make it. Now, the resting-place Billy had once found luxurious, was hard, dirty, and full of vermin. Unwisely he gave vent to his emotions by derisive sniffs, and muttered sarcasms about the condition of his couch. It was the signal for an outburst of ridicule from his old-time cronies.

Pete had accepted Billy on the former friendly footing, partly because he was of a kindly nature, partly because the poor Snipe had been a bond of union between them; but with Ned Wilkes, Tommy Boole, and the rest, it was different. Billy having seen more of the world, wearing very objectionably clean whole clothes, had, so it appeared to

them, returned to put on airs; to tell what he had been reading;—to talk grandly of his future exploits. They gathered about him during the evening and listened rather silently at first, but in the end they began to taunt him. Tommy Boole, a red-headed boot-black, had been head of his clique for several months, and he was decidedly jealous of the new comer.

“What are you down here to-night for, any way, Vanderbilt?” he broke out.

“The Brunswick and the Windsor will keep you for a trifle more,” put in Ned, viciously. “Just order out your baggage, my boy, and have it sent.”

“Oh, he’s been out on his country seat, where everything is fresh. He’ll come out right when he’s got a pawn-ticket for his watch and eat up his diamonds,” added another, and so they kept it going. Billy knew them well enough to show no spite; but when they beguiled him into confiden-

tial statements regarding his Texas enterprise, and then scouted the whole programme, his indignation was extreme. Billy had gone entirely beyond them in the literary way. They had no time for spelling out blood-and-thunder romances. They were, it is true, open to skilful attacks on the romantic side of their nature: but just now, every scamp of them was wild for the high seas. They scoffed at Texas as "played out" long ago. Ned said the grasshoppers ate it up when they devoured Kansas; and Tom added that if they did not, the western fires burned up buffaloes and plains alike.

Billy having thrown buffaloes in as bait, they displayed such coarseness in their criticisms, such ignorance along with their real shrewdness, that now Billy saw them somewhat as Si, or even as Mr. Ellery, might have seen them. He had remembered them as quick to plan, dashing and bold to execute. Now he reflected, that what they

planned and carried out, was, after all, some single bit of fun or mischief, and never anything that required any real knowledge of the world, or any ability to act with continuity of purpose.

Long after every one of them was asleep and snoring, Billy, hot, uncomfortable, and wide awake, was turning over in his mind schemes, which, even then, had he been back in his bed at the farm, he would gladly have given up forever—schemes that were fast appearing to him impractical, if not foolish. These wild Arabs' talk of sea life, was plainly absurd to Billy—why might not his Texan visions be as silly? He wished he had confided in Si Barnard. Here, in the stifling heat and foul air of the cheap lodging-house, everything connected with city low life seemed suddenly foul by contrast with the sweet quiet of the country. How could he have over-rated these old comrades, as he certainly had done, in thinking them capable

of travel — of romantic research? Pete Hurdson, was undeniably clever; but he had grown so lank, so hollow-chested, and coughed so persistently, he was not likely to come out strong in a raid with possible savages. The rest were nothing more nor less than dirty, saucy, little wretches. Alas, poor Billy! He had only got far enough away from them to despise them. It took an older and better person than he was then, to look at them pitifully.

But what should he do? The thought of staying right here in the city, and taking up the former life just where these old mates were in it—and he could, perhaps, not do better than they—was very distasteful. To start forlornly off alone for some unknown regions, with no clear line of procedure marked out, was not an alluring arrangement. Before dawn of the next day, Billy would have given six inches of his stature to have been back at Farmer Ellery's. For what

had he come, anyway? What put these notions into his foolish pate? As he mused there in the darkness, he came to a better appreciation of Stan Ellery's character, than weeks of previous intercourse with him had afforded him. Stan had been "stuffing him," and he had been a fool. Better still, he partially realized what true friends he had turned his back on so ungratefully. This last train of ideas never left him, after its start. All the following day it kept with him, gradually weighing him down with sadness.

He wandered about the docks, trying to get odd jobs, for selling papers had lost its old charm. In that day, it might truly be said, that Billy first saw New York city. He was a child no longer. He had been, insensibly, somewhat educated, and considerably elevated, by contact with industrious, cleanly, sober men, and pure, motherly, Christian women. All the filth, the drunk-

eness, the crime, the poverty, stood out plainly, in bold relief, before the eyes so lately turned from blue skies, green grass, and wild flowers.

At seven o'clock that night, there never was a more home-sick boy on earth than Billy Knox. As he sat on a curbstone opposite Fulton market, watching, with a doleful face, the crowds for Brooklyn boats, there suddenly flashed into his mind something Mr. Ellery once said to him: "Never be ashamed to repent. Don't go on in a foolish way because you've started. If your very shoes refuse to turn, get out of them, and go back barefooted. The cuts you get will make you more careful how you start another time."

He sprang to his feet with a whoop of joy that made the peanut man nearly suspect he'd found somebody's purse.

Billy had been missing nearly a day, before the mystery of his disappearance was

cleared up by Si Barnard, who found the missive pinned to the wagon cushion in the barn. It was very blindly worded, but when he had carried it in to the assembled family, they made out that Billy had run away to seek his fortune in the far West. Si was out of all patience; Mr. Ellery was sincerely sorry, while his wife grieved openly. Billy, in his letter, had spent much time and pains in telling them how kind he thought them all.

“That shows,” said Mrs. Ellery, “that the poor foolish child had right feelings. He was doing so well, and might have made a good, industrious man. What do you suppose will become of him, now?”

The farmer shook his head regretfully, and made no reply. When Si, during the rest of the day, would vent his indignation by mild abuse of the young “vagabond,” Mr. Ellery would only express a fear that he had trusted too much to Billy’s being influenced by his

surroundings, and had given him too little direct instruction and advice. He understood matters more clearly when his good wife found in Billy's room, under the bed, a few of the trashy yarns Stan had given him. He saw, too, that several had Stan's name scrawled on their covers. But Stan, when questioned, seemed greatly surprised at Billy's flight. The books, he said, were some nonsensical things he bought out of curiosity, and threw away. Billy must have fished them out of the waste paper barrel.

When Prissy found the silver on granny's bed, she knew what it meant. Her heart was very soft towards the young "scalawag," as Si called him, and after she had mourned a little over him in Si's presence, the latter relented enough to say : "If he had the least idee where the chap had put for," he'd "quit work for a day or two and follow him up."

About six o'clock of the third day, Silas Barnard was milking Brownie in the lane.

He did not see a boy who came slowly toward the cottage, lagging now and then, where the golden rod and asters were thickest, as if he meditated hiding under some hedge. Brownie placidly chewed her cud. Billy, for he it was who approached, came nearer and nearer, uncertain of his reception, and exceedingly ashamed of himself.

A shadow passed between Si and the sunset light; he looked up, and it was almost a miracle that every drop of milk was not upset, when he saw Billy Knox standing there, every feature quivering with excitement. Si's lips puckered for a long whistle expressive of astonishment. Suddenly Billy made a dive for Brownie, flung his arms around her neck, and, half sobbing, half laughing, kissed her honest old face. Si understood all the forlorn, homesick penitence implied by the performance, but it all struck him so comically, that he roared with laughter. In the twinkling of an eye, Prissy Tarbox was

on the scene; and how her face lighted up at the sight of sheepish Billy! She did not laugh when Si, convulsed with emotion, choked out:

“You can’t be first, Prissy; he has kissed the cow already!”

She cried reprovingly: “Now you stop teasing him, Si Barnard. I will kiss him, for I’m perfectly overjoyed to see him back! What did possess you to run away, child!” And, good as her word, the rosy young woman gave the boy a sounding salute, that made his heart warm with gratitude, and which caused Si, who was usually terribly bashful, to exclaim boldly:

“Don’t stop, Prissy, don’t! If he could give one to the cow, you certainly might count me in”—

Miss Tarbox offered to box his ears; then laying hold of Billy, she bore him triumphantly into her cottage. How inexpressibly beautiful the humble place looked! To sit

again at a neat table and eat wholesome food, daintily cooked; to have granny make a little extra fuss over him, chiefly because Prissy was doing so, and not that she understood the situation; to pour out every detail of his experiences, not sparing himself, and to have Prissy believe that Mr. Ellery would overlook his wrong-doing this once — how good and comforting it all was!

“The first thing you do,” said the practical spinster; “you go down to the brook, and take a bath. It has been a warm day, and the water won’t be too cold. Meanwhile I’ll beat and dust your coat, and make sure you have brought no awful creatures back from that city lodging-house. Then, when you are clean, go up and make your meekest apologies to Mr. Ellery, and tell him how ashamed you are of yourself, as you well may be.”

Billy, swallowing a big bite of apple pie, nodded approval of her sentiments.

"I kind of think," said Prissy, with an idea of finding out something herself, "that he'll be more lenient, because he suspects Stan Ellery hasn't done you any good."

"Oh, I was a fool on my own account, and I sha'n't go up to him confessing some other fellow's sin."

"Well, maybe you had better not," assented Prissy, "it generally is unnecessary."

That was the only time Stan Ellery's name was mentioned in connection with the events related. Billy was no tell-tale; but he had found out for himself, who were his friends, and who not. This was enough.

In the twilight he went to the farm. Mrs. Ellery was very kind to him. Nan said, frankly, she was "very glad to see him again." Mr. Ellery took him alone into a room, but his hand on the boy's arm was as gentle as it was firm. He talked for an hour to Billy, and it was a talk and an hour that left its stamp on his soul. He drew from him

all his crude ideas of what he wanted to become, or to possess; and then, because he was good and manly himself, he showed Billy that to become a good man was a grand aim. Beyond this he went, and made the boy see that work well done was noble, was inspiring, was enough to fill any life with interest.

When the wanderer fell asleep that night again in his clean bed, it was with a great sigh of content, and the reflection: "Si Barnard will never forget that I kissed the cow, and Stan Ellery will twit me of it forever. I don't care, I'd kiss her again. I didn't see a person in the city that looked so good to me."

Si never told Stan, and never himself again alluded to that burst of affection.

CHAPTER IX.

THREE YEARS LATER.

BILLY KNOX, who went up in the Langham Fair balloon, had disappeared—the Will Knox of three years later had, in personal appearance, very little resemblance to the long-legged, fourteen-year-old Arab. Three years of good living, and of healthy exercise in farm work, had made him a broad-shouldered, handsome young fellow. Even the obnoxious red hair had taken on a shade dark enough to be no longer conspicuous; while there was a gleam of good comradeship in Billy's black eye, something open and attractive in his sun-burned face. As Silas and Prissy had predicted, his career in the district school had been highly suc-

cessful. He had led the boys in every kind of mischief known or to be devised. He had tormented all the girls, Nan excepted; but he had carried the old will and spirit into study. He learned everything between the covers of the books he attacked. He spelled down the school when occasion offered, and no boy learned great swelling orations easier, or roared them out more emphatically, than Billy Knox, on "speaking days."

The Ellerys continued to befriend him, and Silas Barnard many a time had, as Billy confessed, made him "toe the mark," when he was about to cut a quite uncalled for caper of some sort. Now "Will" was seventeen years old. He had learned considerable about farm work in the past three years, and he liked it well enough to think he would become a farmer; but he wished first to get more of an education. There was in the near town of Sefton, an excellent academy, where were taught all the higher Eng-

lish branches, as well as Greek and Latin.

Billy—for so his farm friends continued to call him—resolved to give himself, by some means, at least one school year at the Academy. Accordingly, one morning, late in the summer, he started for Sefton, to see how this might be accomplished. As he passed the cottage, Prissy Tarbox called to him to stop there a moment, while she made ready a parcel to send by him.

“All right,” he returned, going in to see granny, who sat comfortably enjoying the late breakfast that Prissy had set out for her. It seemed to Billy that three years had made granny younger. Indeed, she had, after one severe attack of illness, recovered more strength of body and greater clearness of mind than she had possessed for a long time previous. To be sure, this morning she asked Billy three times, with eager curiosity, where he was going; and she forgot almost immediately the answer she received; but

she remembered that he had mended her rocking-chair the day before, and now insisted on his sitting in it.

"So you're going to try town-life a while, are you?" asked Prissy, tying her bundle. "How are you going to manage?"

"Well, you know the fourth story of the Academy is divided into rooms for fellows from the country. They can bring their provisions from home, cook for themselves, or board in town; the room rent is small."

"What are you going to do?"

"I can tell you better when I have found out. If you'll lend me a loaf of bread I'll tuck it under my arm and play I am Benjamin Franklin. I am as poor as he was and twice as promising, if my friends only thought so. You know I'll be a great success in some line, don't you, granny?"

The old woman set down her trembling cup and let her mild blue eyes rest on the boyish face, as she answered, tenderly:

“Yes, Ben, if you start right.”

Prissy smiled, thinking of Ben Franklin, but Billy knew she thought him the little Ben who long ago started right, and that in heaven, not here. He said, as Prissy gave him the bundle :

“How shall I start right?”

“Take with you the message for to-day. See, Prissy has it ready for me every morning.”

Billy followed the glance of her eye toward the wall, where just a little higher than her head hung her “texts,” in great printed letters—“There, child, you couldn’t start with a better one. Just you go saying, honestly : ‘Teach me to do thy will ; for thou art my God : thy Spirit is good : lead me into the land of uprightness.’”

“Sefton is a pretty hard town. I don’t believe it’s located in that land,” said Billy, lightly, but under his breath ; then giving the old lady a kindly pat on her bent shoulders, he was off again.

The Sefton Academy was a great stone building, quite picturesque, being overrun with vines, and standing in a grove of maple and elm trees. The principal and his family occupied part of the first floor, the second and third floors were for recitation and assembly rooms: the upper floor was reserved for the purpose mentioned. Billy pushed open the great front door and went quietly about examining the empty rooms, on up through halls, and came at last to the "Boarders' Hall." The rooms here were low and dark with the smoke of innumerable messes cooked by generations of boys, while the woodwork of every window and door was covered with names, pictures, or doggerel rhymes. Each room had a closet, but no furniture beyond a "four-foot," bedstead, corded with ropes, on which could rest the mattress and the boy, to be each season provided. A withered old man, with his neck curiously awry, was sweeping the

hall into which these upper rooms opened, and Billy asked him a few questions about ways and means.

“Yes, I know about everything, for I’ve took care of this here building goin’ on fourteen years. Some rooms is more, some less, accordin’ to size and heatin’ conveniences. That ’ere north one, now, is big, has two closets, and the fellers that had it last year could fire up there hot in the coldest weather.”

Billy listened attentively, but with some disappointment, on learning that this man “took care” of the building. He had imagined he might pay his way by some such work.

“What is the cheapest room here?” he asked, putting his head into a small apartment with no chimney-hole.

“That very cubby-hole you’re in now. It can be warmed only by the general heat from the hall, and there aint no arrangements

for cookin'. 'Dingy?' Jes so! Hiram Cox had it last year; he made his coffee over a lamp, got something warm at a eatin' house when he was sharp set, and et cold snacks the rest of the time."

"Hiram is still alive, I suppose?" said Billy, musing, as he stood by the window. He wanted to be entirely self-supporting throughout this school year—how was he going to be so? He studied the church steeples, the long shaded streets, looked away to the distant hills, and the line of woods beyond the river, glittering in the noon-day sun. Then he called out to the old man, who was about departing with his broom and dust-pan:

"Do you know any way a fellow could get outside work enough to keep him here?"

"Well, this Hi Cox did that very thing, but for the life of me, I don't remember what twas. Kind of seems as if some old maid hired him to—to—well, I give it up!"

"I wish I knew what he did. Any old maid may have me for ordinary work, or for ornamental purposes, if she will pay me for the time out of school."

There was something about Billy that interested "Uncle Zeph," who came in and perched himself on the old bedstead to rest, putting the broom between his legs, and twisting one arm around the tall post.

"Do you know any of the Sefton folks?"

"Some of them."

"Know old Doctor Higbee?"

"I've seen him racing around the country in a two-wheeled 'shay,' with half a dozen dogs behind him."

"Yes, he likes dogs: he's a queer case, old Higbee is! You needn't never go near him if you ain't got something awful ailing of you. He'll act madder than a hornet if you pester him with little aches and ails. My wife's weakly, and one spell her stomach ached—betwixt you and me, and this bed-

post that was about all there was of it ; but nothin' would do but she must consult Doctor Higbee. She'd figgured out fust what did ail her, and she mostly wanted to go and tell him. She said her in'erds was ossified partly, and partly they was all galvanized over with a fungus growth ; and how on arth was I to know t'want so, if Silome said 'twas so ? I jest took her and went canterin' over to the office. Well, old Higbee set to and berated her for eatin' salt pork, pickles, mince pie and green tea for her supper ; and he never give her medicine enough to kill a kitten. He neglects folks that way, awfully, till they git just to where Death's sort o' got one claw on 'em ; then, I tell you, there's a free fight betwixt him and the old doctor. Why, the sick 'un will fairly get one foot into the tomb, but old Higbee will have a grip on his coat tails and yank—yank him back every time. He beats many a time after the

heirs-at-law have bought black kids for the funeral. He"—

Billy began to betray his impatience, and laughingly exclaimed: "But I haven't got the stomach-ache, nor one foot in the tomb."

"No, no, certainly not; but the old doctor, you know, why, he has hired one boy off and on for one thing or another, he"—

"Where does he live?"

"Next the Methodist church, in a big red brick house, and his sign is over the door."

Uncle Zeph was perfectly willing to sit still a while longer, in order to find out leisurely where Billy came from, and all about him; but in a moment the young fellow was whistling down the old worn staircase, with full purpose of mind to find Doctor Higbee. This was easily done, for his house was only a block away, and the old gentleman himself stood on the piazza, awaiting some one or some thing. Billy gave a quick look at his weather-beaten face, framed around with

yellow hair, which was gray and white in patches; then he explained in the briefest way that he was looking for work, and under what conditions he hoped to find it.

“Know anything about horses?”

“Everything about them,” returned Billy.

The doctor put a few more questions, then remarked: “A woman rules every house. I havn’t any wife, but my sister keeps us all in order here. She has said lately she wouldn’t have any more hired men eating and sleeping in the house. The last one broke the cook’s heart, and then eloped with the chamber-maid. Catherine! Come to the door a minute!”

In response to his call, which came from no weak lungs, a tall, prim lady appeared, a polished, metallic kind of a spinster, clad in spotless steel gray. She heard what the doctor and Billy had to say; then she was inclined to make terms with the latter. After further consultation, the old gentleman made

this proposal. Billy was to do all necessary work at the stable, morning, noon and night. He was, as soon as the weather grew cold, to bring coal and feed the furnace which warmed the house, and to empty the ashes. Later yet, he must shovel snow from the walks about the place. He must, when required, sit and study evenings in the doctor's office, in order to receive messages when the old gentleman was out. For these, and some other lighter duties, Billy was offered an amount sufficient to pay all his weekly expenses, if he lived with the utmost economy. The contract was made on the spot, and Billy returned to the Academy with a light heart. He found old Uncle Zeph still busy, and this time he fully satisfied his curiosity regarding himself, while he told him of his bargain with the doctor, adding :

“ Now, I can engage a room here, and be on hand when the term commences. You better save this little rat hole for me.”

"No, you don't need to have that. You just engage half this good-sized west room, that can have a stove in it. Somebody will take the other half quick enough, and there you are, as fine as a fiddle. I'll see you have a decent chap in with you. Squire Ellery has done me more 'n one favor; I can do that much for one that's anything to him. Though, if you ain't really one of the family, I may say, that Stan Ellery was about the worst cut of anything we ever had in this school. I was proper glad to see the last of him. I heard no tutor would teach him, and he had to come here. Where is he, now?"

"He is here in Sefton, reading law."

"Reading law!" sneered Uncle Zeph. "Well, good morning to you, Knox. I s'pose you'll be fetchin' your traps over a day or two before school?"

"Yes; Mother Ellery says she shall come over and see I have a nail to hang a towel

on—and a towel for the nail,” laughed Billy, starting for the home tramp.

When Billy reported proceedings to the family, everybody was pleased. Mr. Ellery had intended to send him to school that year at his own expense, if the young fellow found no work ; but he thought it best to let Billy be independent just as far as possible.

Nan had attended a girls' school in Sefton for a long time. She boarded in the town from Monday until Friday night, but came home always to spend Saturday and Sunday. She was glad Billy was to be near her, as he might sometimes be of service to her. She had ceased to look at him entirely in the light of a servant. In mental ability and in physical endowments he was the equal of any farmer's son of his age in the community. Nan and he had frequent brisk encounters of their wits, and at such times each spoke with great plainness.

In the beginning of Billy's career he had

"hated" all girls, but after brief acquaintance he accepted Nan as a girl almost "wide awake enough to be a boy." At this period of Billy's existence, he was somewhat given to attending singing-schools, for the sake of the "girls." He often wrote in their autograph books, and made them, at least several of them, rings out of carved nutshells. Toward Nan only, his sentiments remained the same, and he was careful that she should never classify him as a "spoony." He feared her sharp little tongue, which seldom spared him any railing, if, in her opinion, his foibles deserved her sarcasm or ridicule. But she could be very pleasant and unselfish; as, for instance, she was at this time, in helping Billy get his room at the Academy in order.

One day, after much debate, and no little work, Mrs. Ellery and Nan requested Billy to get out the "lumber wagon," and aid them in getting his housekeeping apparatus

over to Sefton, that they might personally superintend its arrangement after it arrived there. This was accordingly done; then, a few days before the school began, the three went over and made the place very attractive in Billy's estimation. They took comfortable bedding, bright calico curtains, a big red wooden arm-chair, a good lamp, and all needed dishes.

"Now mind what I say, my boy," said good Mrs. Ellery; "spend your wages for proper clothing and books, but don't bother yourself to buy things to eat."

Before she could add anything, Billy gave a low boyish howl of disappointment, and expostulated with her thus:

"But I must eat sometimes; say on Sundays, just a morsel. My education is going to my head, not into my stomach."

"Now be still, Billy. I mean that when we come in for Nan, Fridays, and again to bring her back Mondays, I shall send you

bread, butter, cold meat, beans, pie and doughnuts. Bakery food is poor stuff, and any messes you would cook up would be worse yet."

"Oh, Billy can make custard, mother," exclaimed Nan, who was spreading out a yellow calico bed-quilt, on whose glowing surface blossomed blood-red tulips and grass-green rushes. This last was Prissy's contribution.

"Don't you remember the day he surprised us with one, when we came home from Langham—ten eggs to a quart of milk, and flavored it with essence of peppermint?"

Billy tried to overpower her laughter with loud driving of tacks. He endured a great deal of teasing meekly, seeing how busy her deft hands were working for his comfort.

Nan was a bright little girl. Everybody said "little," although she was seventeen, but she had put on no young lady airs and graces. Her hair hung down her back in

the same dark "pig tail," as Billy ungallantly styled it, and her simple dresses were still short enough to show her trim ankles.

"There," said Mrs. Ellery, at last. "You have things enough to be quite comfortable here, even if your room-mate should not provide his share. I hope he will be somebody well disposed; no fellow with bad or disagreeable habits."

"I hope not, but it won't matter so much. I can stand it if he is not a very tame animal, for I shall be in school-rooms during school hours and at the doctor's a good share of the time out of school."

"There will be Saturdays and Sundays. I want you to go to church every Sunday, Billy."

"I will go as regularly as the parson himself."

The room was in perfect order before sunset; then Mrs. Ellery and Nan went home. Billy locked his door, gave the key to uncle Zeph, and did an errand or two in town be-

fore going to the farm. He was very hopeful and happy as he walked the pleasant streets in the golden afternoon light. The change of work, the new habits of life to be for a while his, seemed really delightful. He planned to make the most of every moment. Sefton had a fine public library; surely he could get some time to read. Nan told of many fine free lectures; he might very likely attend some of these. Doctor Higbee had said he should not want him every evening. As he turned a corner he came in near sight of a great yellow show bill, and could not repress a derisive laugh at the pictured semicircle of "negro," minstrels; but after the laugh he stood soberly regarding the "end man." He was mentally putting himself in this man's place, and wondering if he wanted his life, his pay—and if not, why not.

"He makes money; I don't get half as much—he sees the world as I don't—I am

greener now, I suppose, than I was at eleven ; then you might throw me into any city and I should alight on my feet like a cat, and find my living anywhere ; but as little Ben said, ‘ It isn’t being a man,’ to fool through the days and years as this fellow does with his burnt cork. I gained more than shows right on the surface when I went over the fence that day to work for ‘ Squire Ellery,’” and turning away from the hand-bill, the ruddy-cheeked fellow bethought himself of the home he had found, and the family that seemed now almost like his own kin. Their interests were his, and his were theirs. Mrs. Ellery gave him the counsels of a mother, and many sisters were less kind than Nan.

“ I’ve had a good chance to make a decent chap of myself, and if I don’t I ought to be thrashed and sent to the penitentiary,” was the summing up of the matter in Billy’s mind, and he went home hopeful and content, as if he had been the son of a millionaire.

CHAPTER X.

A NEW IMPULSE.

ALL went well with Billy in the very first weeks at the academy. His work at Doctor Higbee's stable was not at all burdensome, and there was as yet no other tasks about the house to perform. In school he easily acquired the good-will of the teachers and of his fellow-students. His room-mate was a tall delicate fellow, with such refined quiet ways that he made Billy feel at first shy and awkward; but Ned Fenton put on no airs of superiority. He frankly admired Billy's "muscle." He added his finer contributions to the furniture of their room without any parade; and after a little good-natured raillery at Prissy's taste in

bed-quilts, won Billy's favor. Ned was the only son of a clergyman's widow. He was cared for and educated by his wealthy grandmother, with whom his mother, who had been left poor, made her home. He had never been strong, so he had become rather self-indulgent. Billy could hardly think him lazy; yet when not, as he frequently was, excited by fun making, or interested in the pursuits most congenial to his tastes, Ned seemed to dread exertion, mental or physical. He would lie in bed in the morning until an hour which Billy thought ridiculously late; then would get up with an abused, dogged air, half assumed and comical, half real and felt. The next thing in order was the making of his strong coffee, of which he drank inordinately; then he was ready for study. When Billy left him, at an early hour in the evening, he had usually disposed of his lessons—for he learned rapidly—and was deep in some old book or new magazine. It

seemed to his simple room-mate that Ned had read every book known in literature ; and he looked up to him as to a superior intellect. In fact, young Fenton had good literary taste ; he had also a quick, sensitive mind, appreciative of the best, if not powerful in all its workings.

It was a rule of the Academy that every student on the "fourth story" should attend some church on Sunday morning. It was old Uncle Zeph's duty to see that every fellow was out of his room by half-past ten. Very few attempted to cheat him, and fewer succeeded in so doing ; but occasionally boys who were not in their rooms on Sunday were not in church.

From the first Billy had, according to his promise made to Mrs. Ellery, gone regularly to the church which Nan attended, and he also entered a Sunday-school class. He might not have done this last unsolicited, but as he stood in the church vestibule, after the

morning service one Sunday, a gentleman asked him into a Bible class. He found, a little to his surprise, Ned Fenton seated in the class, as if he had long belonged there. It was evident that the latter was at home in such places. He answered readily questions on matters of religious belief and practice, when the other members of the class seemed, like Billy, unable to bring much of an answer out of any inner experience, or promptly to compose one from thoughtful observation. This puzzled Billy somewhat, but he reflected that Ned was a minister's son, and must have heard much discussion of religious topics.

Billy's evenings were usually spent in the doctor's office, but this Sunday evening he was at liberty. After supper he said to Ned, who was idly drumming on the window-pane:

“What are you going to do to-night?”

“I don't know. Do you like hymn-singing?”

That depends. I like some hymns and some singing—my own not much, and yours not at all.”

“Humph! Ever go to a gospel meeting?”

“Why, I suppose so. I never went to any other sort.”

“I’ll wager you have. Well, there’s one held by the Young Men’s Christian Association, in a hall in Cleaver Street. We’ll go.”

“Why isn’t it in a church?”

“Oh, it is to draw in folks that might not go into a church. They sing well; that is the reason I go sometimes.” Ned spoke in a very indifferent tone; but he began to put on his coat, so Billy arose and followed him.

The “gospel meeting” was like many others held all over the land, but it had some new features to Billy. He liked the easy, informal exercises, the frequent singing by all the people of the inspiring hymns. He had always attended church, because the

Ellery family did so, and he considered it right and becoming; but he had never been consciously moved out of his peace of mind by any sermon ever heard.

This night, toward the end of the meeting, his attention wandered, and he was reviewing a certain mathematical problem, when a plain faced, quiet man began to talk, as if he were urging something deeply felt by himself on some one hearer in whom he was personally interested. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" that was his message: for like a message it came slowly and solemnly to Billy. At first he listened because the man meant what he said; then because the man's meaning held him. There was a God. He had always said he believed it; but had he ever realized the awful thought of God and himself, one in relation to the other? Never! God had a kingdom, and reigned in heaven—yes, Billy had calmly accepted that; but he reigned in

some human hearts—of that he had not reasoned. As the man told of that reign—that it meant active love; fervent toward the heavenly Father, helpful toward every human creature—meant pardon of sin, help in temptation, a light on all life, an indescribable, wistful sadness took hold of Billy. He had felt it more faintly just once before. It was that spring morning when a tender sunshine rested on the earth, and he, sitting desolate in the old doorway, peered in where he could see the white apple blossoms around little white Ben; and there stirred in him regret, a sense of something sweet and pure that he was missing. Then he only dully knew that he could not enter that kingdom, which the neighbors whispered about as the home of the child. That, as a result of that longing, he took a long step towards better things by going to the farmer, he was not aware. But to-night, when the man dwelt on the words, “Seek ye,” Billy clearly felt that a

call had come to him which he must deliberately comply with, or as deliberately refuse. He had not lived these last years in a Christian family without learning, intellectually, what was meant by a Christian life; but, until now, he had never in his heart asked:

“What is my life? What do I want it to be? What ought it to be?”

He looked at Ned, and saw him yawn, as if a little weary of the speaker. The man, and his words, so affected Billy, he had supposed he must be holding everyone's attention.

“They won't sing any more to amount to anything. Let us go,” whispered Ned, as the speaker sat down.

Billy felt a sudden desire to get away from the place—perhaps from its influence, and he went out without remonstrance.

“Rather dull to-night; they often are,” said Ned, as they sauntered home in the clear starlight.

His companion made no response ; he was lost in thought. They soon passed a little shop, half restaurant, half confectioner's, and Ned stopped before the lighted window.

"Hold on a minute, Knox. I am awfully thirsty. I'll have a glass of beer ; don't you want one ?"

No ; I'll walk on," returned Billy.

"Very well ; I'll overtake you. I like beer : I ought to have been a Dutchman. I'd have a keg for home consumption, if it wasn't against Academy rules."

Billy hardly heard him. He had seen so many noisy rum-holes, that this quiet spot in the pretty town did not seem to him very objectionable. He walked along under the trees until Ned caught up with him again.

"Don't you ever drink beer ?" he asked, a little curiously.

"No."

"You don't think it wrong, do you ?"

"You weren't brought up on it, were you ?"

“ In a parson’s family ? No indeed ! ”

“ Well, I was not either, but my nursery was a sort of a beer garden, as you might say. My father drank—anything—everything but water ; and beer was to him when he couldn’t get whiskey, what bread is to a fellow who can’t get meat. My mother was good as gold, but all the other women in the tenement house guzzled beer incessantly. They were always slapping along the pavement in slip-shod old shoes, a dirty shawl over their heads, and a broken-nosed pitcher in their hands, after beer—beer. When their hungry young ones yelled they made them sleepy with it, and when these young ones grew a little older they spent their own pennies for it. I was in the beer business myself once. There was an old hag in a cellar near by our street, who took me into partnership. I used to go around with a tin pail, getting slops and dregs from the bottom of the beer casks at doors when they were

sending them to be refilled. She gave me a few coppers, and made much more by peddling this stuff for half the price of the better article. I think I got enough of beer in those days."

Billy's tone was not in the least vehement, or like one who lectures another. He seemed coolly accounting for a personal peculiarity. He had forgotten the whole conversation when they reached home; but he was not in a lively mood. Usually he liked to talk; so Ned, finding him pre-occupied, took a book and was soon lost in its contents. About eleven o'clock, the latter, looking up, saw him still gazing at the one picture that adorned their walls, but not as if greatly interested in it.

"What are you thinking about, old fellow? I thought you had gone to bed."

"Fenton, you are a—you ought to know about all these things, if you are a minister's son. Now, about how much must a

body discount on that man's talk to-night?"

"What man's talk?" was Ned's bewildered question.

"The one who talked about 'seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness;' and did it every bit as earnestly as if he was selling western land, and expected to make something out of you and me."

"Why, he meant it, of course. He's a kind of city missionary, who comes here occasionally."

"And you believe every word he says?"

"Why, yes—all that I can remember of that he said to-night."

"Then, why are you not doing something; or why haven't you done something about it?"

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked Ned, tossing his book aside and facing Billy.

"If it is all true, why are you not a Christian?"

“Are you one yourself?”

“No.”

Ned flushed a little, glanced at Billy, and remarked :

“I am—a member of the church.”

“A Christian?” asked Billy, so quickly that Ned was forced to reply :

“Of course—I suppose so.”

“I should think you’d know what you were.”

It was impossible to take offence where none was meant; and as Billy’s voice was full of curiosity, Ned said :

“If you had been brought up as I have been, perhaps you would not be able to tell what you had found out for yourself from what people had told you about everything religious. You don’t want any beer, because you had so much around you when you were young. I don’t listen with great enthusiasm to every sermon, for I’ve heard ten thousand odd in the course of my life.”

“You believe in them?” persisted Billy.

“Yes, certainly.”

There was a long silence after that, but at last it was broken by Ned, who arose, and stretching himself, said lazily :

“I haven’t much backbone, I can tell you, in the outset. You’ll not think much of me in the long run. I always do what I feel like doing.”

Billy said nothing, and soon there was silence and darkness in the old Academy ; but one boy was not asleep. It was characteristic of Billy to look at issues squarely, and to act, if he saw the time had come for action. He went over and over the late sermon, and at last there, in the darkness, reverently, with full purpose of heart to “seek,” that kingdom learned of, he prayed in the very words given him by poor old granny : “Teach me to do thy will ; for thou art my God : thy spirit is good ; lead me into the land of uprightness.”

Ned saw no great or immediate change in him from that time, although he noticed that he was interested in his Sunday-school class; so much so, he seemed to study his lesson during the week; and as he put it, Knox was always "on the square." Ned's own profession having little to do with his conduct, he was not inclined to criticise Billy for not defining his position more fully.

Ned Fenton was somewhat older than Billy, and the latter was not surprised to learn from him that he was an acquaintance of Stan Ellery. In fact, before they had been long together at the Academy, Stan one day walked into their room. He had always kept on good terms with Billy; but it is not probable he would have come to see him, had Ned not been his room-mate.

These two talked of many people unknown to Billy, for both of them were in a sense "in society,"—while Billy had his own position to make hereafter in the social world.

Stan, as a young man of property, education, and refined (?) manners, visited the best families of the town, and Ned might do the same whenever he chose.

“By the way, Stan,” asked Ned, as young Ellery, tipping back in his chair, put his heels on top of their small stove, “I’ve meant to ask you before this, who that mighty pretty girl was I saw you with at a concert one Wednesday evening not long ago. I have not seen such bright eyes in an age.”

“Wednesday—bright eyes? O that is Nan! Awful pity she is my cousin, and knows me like a book, for she is getting so saucy it would be downright fun to flirt with her.”

„ Well, I’m not her own cousin, and she don’t know me; suppose you flirt by proxy. If you will introduce Miss Nan to me, she may be just as saucy as she likes. I hate insipid girls.”

"All right, young man," said Stan. "Come around to-morrow night, and I'll take you to see her, and several other pretty girls. They are all young. Nan has only just put her hair up like a young lady—but they are nice. They board with a proper old maid who don't let them run wild, by any means; but being one of Uncle Zeph's family, or about the same as that, I go to see Nan any time. Of course, I can take a friend. It will be a good idea, for she bothered me about to death last winter to go skating with her. I'll put you in her charge, *vicè versa*; and when the time comes, if you are fools enough to like the ice, you can freeze in one another's society."

"Stan, you're a trump! Isn't there something or other I can do for you?"

"Yes, come back to the club."

"Oh, I can't afford it; or if I can spare the fees, I can't spend the time."

"Nonsense! Come over to-morrow night;

we're going to have some fun. If you will, I'll tell Nan no end of fine things about you, before I trot you out."

"Oh, go along! You needn't 'paint the lily and gild the rose.' I'll speak for myself, if you give me the chance."

"Havn't a doubt of it. Girls are generally geese enough to like a lazy, indifferent wretch like you. Your miserable liver makes you pale, and I presume she'll fancy you're killing yourself with hard study."

A boot-jack was aimed at Stan's head, but it struck the wall, already battered beyond injury, while Stan, calmly "ducking" to avoid it, went on. "Here's Billy now, all brawn and muscle; he's worth six of us for all practical purposes; but I bet you, not a girl in Nan's 'set,' as she calls it, would see anything about Billy but the size of his boots."

"They'd be taken up with a big subject, even then," laughed Billy, who sat writing not far off. He laughed, but he was not

wholly amused. His boots were big, but so was he, and he had no desire to shrink. He did not wish to belong to any club. The fun Stan enjoyed would be too costly, even if it would have suited his taste in other respects. He did not expect, later in the season, to have many leisure hours in which he could skate, and he had not proposed to himself ever to go skating with Nan. It did occur to him now that he might do this under some circumstances. No, perhaps not. Nan at home, he could meet on easy terms of familiarity; but Nan in town, with stylish young friends, would, perhaps, not want her father's farm-hand for an escort. Be that as it might, Billy was not glad to have Stan make Ned acquainted with Nan. It was not that he did not see a great deal that was agreeable and attractive about his roommate, for he did see his many fine qualities. It did not once come home to Billy, that in his own acknowledgment of this last fact, was the real secret of his uneasiness.

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE RED COTTAGE.

“ANY messages left with you while I was out?” asked the old doctor, shaking himself free from his great coat, and sitting down by the office fire.

“An old lady called—Mrs. McGerald, and left word that she needed a tonic. She thought some strong bitters would do her good,” replied Billy.

“I’ll warrant she said that! Well, bitters she shall have; but she won’t be suited, not if they are as bitter even as the gall of bitterness the good Book speaks of. There are bitters and bitters. I never expected to see Mrs. McGerald again after any more of my bitters, because there was only a gill of whiskey

in the last that I made her, and she thinks a pint is little enough. If I'd give her a quart flavored with ginger and orange peel, and tell her to take it whenever she 'felt gone inside,' she'd have more faith in me than she has now. I tell you what, young man, if I should prescribe 'bitters' to all the women who tell me they need 'toning up,' I could keep a precious lot of 'em 'high' most of the time."

"What do drinking women come to a doctor for?"

"Drinking women! Why, they are many of them the first ladies of the town. They don't drink, they only crave a stimulant, and the more 'bitters' they take, the more they want. There is one lady in the town who would use such an amount, I refused to give her any; but her son had to come and beg me to supply her with what she demanded, only making it as weak as possible; otherwise she would get the liquor

from headquarters. When she had poured it, full strength, over the dregs of her last bitters, it was medicine, of course. He said the sediment in one pint bottle lasted out three quarts of Jamaica rum. She took bitters when faint before her meals, bitters after eating to aid digestion, bitters to overcome sleeplessness, bitters when she was chilled, bitters for a 'low state of the blood'—bitters early, and bitters late."

"Why, do they like the taste of the nasty stuff?"

"No; or they would not take it, if the taste was all there was to it."

"Well, if it is the effect they want, why not take the pure liquor?"

"Their consciences wouldn't allow that. It must be medicine for their stomachs' sake," grunted the old doctor.

"How funny! I should think they would take wine, or even beer."

"Bless your heart, boy! they do all that.

Why, one lady—she used to be my patient, but is not now, because I told her once she had ‘hysterics’—this lady took strong bitters for medicine, port wine for a tonic, and beer to ‘aid digestion and induce sleep.’ Her husband used to tell me he believed he should buy a distillery, and have done with it, for he was tired of running around to fill small orders.”

“Such men must be mighty pusillanimous. Why don’t they put a stop to the whole thing—just put their foot down?” exclaimed Billy.

“Ho ! ho !” chuckled Dr. Higbee. “You’ll be wiser when your beard is grown. Set your foot down—what on, pray? This woman’s husband is a temperance man, and is as big as the Cardiff Giant besides; but when she drops back, throws up her delicate hands, gasps, and can only just pant out a request for something ‘stimulating’—do you suppose he dare say: ‘You can’t have it; it

is against my principles?' Of course he can't! The kinder hearted he is, the quicker he runs for the brandy bottle."

"Well, then, why don't he argue with his wife and convince her of her folly?"

The old doctor gave Billy the benefit of a prolonged grin, before he returned: "You are not married yet, neither am I—but I'm acquainted with a great many married women. I have the highest opinion of them. It is my private and professional opinion, in fact, that the world could not get on well without them; but every one of them can out-argue her husband, and when she has convinced herself, she is convinced, and that's the end of it."

Billy sat eyeing a box of pills: he was silent, as became his youth and inexperience. The doctor's next remark was a little unexpected:

"Bitters are expensive, and hysterics are troublesome, but some women have neither.

So taking them all as they come, like needles, sharps, flats and assorted, I think they are a mighty sight better than men. Get a wife as soon as you can take good care of her. I should have done the same, long ago, if folks had ever given me a chance to attend to it between office hours. If I were to get one as far as the altar to-day, before I could say 'yes,' I'll wager the parson himself would take that time to have a fit, and need my services more than I needed his."

The doctor's tone was as serious as possible; moreover, he seemed in an unusually social mood, for he poked the fire, and leaning back in his great arm-chair, asked, graciously :

"What are you going to make of yourself, Knox?"

"Well, I think it is likely that I shall be a farmer."

"Good for you! If one-half the young

fellows that set out to wear a white choker, or to carry medicine chests, would go on farms, they would be better off, and so would the rest of mankind. It is clean work, morally, and"—

There was a loud rap on the office door, and when Billy opened it a boy shouted out: "Miss Perkins wants the doctor, quick; she's most dying."

"She aint either, no where near it."

"Wall, she says she is, and they want you quick."

"She has died just so, half a dozen times this year; but I'm coming," growled the doctor, pulling on his boots.

Billy, left alone in the office to await his return, was laughing to himself at the old man's oddities, and at his advice about matrimony, when he remembered a very important event which was to take place on the next evening—nothing more or less than a wedding.

Silas Barnard and Prissy Tarbox had undeniably reached years of discretion. Silas had been very devoted to Prissy for a long time. Prissy had been by turns, as Silas phrased it, "getatable, and then again not getatable." She declared she "never would be engaged until she got ready to be married, for what was the use?" Silas would not ask her to marry him until he was able to support her as well as she could support herself by dressmaking, and so months and even years had gone by. Now Silas had a snug little sum in the bank, and he was quite ready and more than willing to marry Prissy. They were to remain in the little house, which had, however, undergone several decided changes. Two rooms had been added, and the whole painted and repaired. Granny was to remain there the same as before, for Silas was as fond of her as was Billy.

When Dr. Higbee returned, Billy requested leave of absence for the next night, and

was told that he could attend the wedding, of which we will now go on to speak in detail.

It was a cold, starlit night in January when Billy arrived, a little late, at the cottage, and found assembled there a small but merry company. Prissy's new "parlor" was as pretty as her eye for bright colors and her own good sense could make it; and Prissy herself was of course the centre of attraction. She looked as much like a rosy apple as ever, and was not half as scared as was Silas, who would lurk in out-of-the-way corners, conscious of an entirety, so to speak, of good clothes, never experienced all at once before during his existence.

Mr. and Mrs. Ellery were there, making themselves agreeable to the friends and neighbors invited; for neither bride nor groom had any relatives present. Billy's first chat was with Prissy, whom he found giving a last look at the excellent supper, to be attended to later in the evening.

"How fine you look!" he exclaimed, admiringly.

"Well, I hope I aint a perfect fright, Billy," she replied, straightening a platter of cold turkey on the table. "Si was for having me wear bride's white flumididairy, but I told him never! I could neither make butter nor go to prayer-meetin' in a white muslin, while a sensible dark blue cashmere I could wear, and turn and wash, and dye black when I got through with it for best. Where is Nan? I thought she was coming with you."

"No, her mother says Stan Ellery will bring her."

"Yes, I remember now, that Si said Stan thought it was such splendid sleighing, maybe Nan and he would ride over and bring some of their friends. There they are now, as likely as not."

There was a sound of sleigh-bells and merry voices, much stamping of feet and

more laughter before the new comers entered. Nan came first, then a fair, tall girl of about the same age, then Stan Ellery and Ned Fenton. Ned was introduced to Prissy, and Billy to the young lady, whose name was Sara Wells. While Stan went out again to put his horses in his uncle's barn, Ned said laughingly to Billy:

"I did not tell you I was invited, because I am not sure I was asked in any ordinary way; but Stan and Miss Ellery were kind enough to let me come."

Prissy assured him that all of Miss Nan's friends would be welcome, if the house would only hold them; so Ned proceeded to make himself at home. He did it in a pleasing, animating way, which Billy found as new as interesting. In less than half an hour he had talked with Mr. and Mrs. Ellery in a frank, intelligent fashion they greatly liked; he had sought out Silas, and made him almost forget that the minister was in the par-

lor, and that he had got to marry Prissy with a ring that he feared much he should drop. He had kindly seen to it that Sara Wells was not left with people entirely unknown to her, and very decidedly he devoted himself later to Nan's entertainment.

Billy had never seen Nan Ellery look so bright and so altogether charming as to-night. Her eyes sparkled with mischief, and her cheeks were as brilliant as the rose-colored ribbons she wore with her dark and trim-fitting dress. She was overflowing with good spirits and ready to talk with anybody. But Billy, for some unaccountable reason, could not walk boldly up to her and jest or tease her in the old familiar way. He envied Ned the ease, the half deferential, half confidential manner of address so natural to him. It must be pleasant, and it must make Ned liked by the people whom he thus approached.

There were half a dozen nice girls there, all old school-mates of Billy, but much to

their surprise, he was as dignified and ceremonious as if he had never begged them for their photographs or sent them remarkable valentines. They resented his gravity a little, but secretly they thought he had "improved;" therefore it was a pity that this last was just what he did not think about them. He watched them—and Nan, as the evening went by. He reflected that where Nan was sprightly, they were loud, in an innocent rustic way, certainly: but their way made her way seem doubly pretty and refined.

"How do you get on, Billy, at the Academy?" she suddenly asked, standing at his side, and adding, in a minute, "your roommate says you are a 'living reproach' to him, because you are so studious. That's a good boy!"

Billy was almost a six-footer; but it was not his size, as he stood looking down on Nan's soft hair and her mocking eyes—not

that which made him feel that he was not a "boy" any longer. It was instead the clear realization that he should never think of Nan again as a little girl. His old careless intercourse with her was at an end. He had begun to love her exactly as a young man like Ned Fenton, socially her equal, older, better read, more polished than he Billy Knox was—as such an one might venture to love the young girl whom he hoped to win some day, and to marry. He glanced at the older Ellerys almost with fear. Nan, their only child, the pride of their hearts, the heir to their property—and Billy Knox, whom they had taken from poverty and ignorance—what if they knew his thoughts? But his thoughts were honest, manly and tender ones, if they were perhaps presumptuous, and certainly not hopeful. Billy, at this crisis in his life, was almost morbidly humble. His past was too near him, his future too undefined, even in imagination. He could not believe wholly

in Prissy Tarbox's prophecy that "Some day Billy Knox will be as good as anybody, if he only keeps on behaving well."

Soon Nan gave Billy's elbow a jog, whispering, "Get out of the minister's way! How much room you take up! They are going to begin now!"

Somebody looked behind doors and secured Silas, who, once fairly captured, walked out bravely, while Prissy turned pale, but had presence of mind enough to stop exactly on the pink tulip in her carpet which she had previously selected to stand on during the ceremony. After the ceremony, which was, on Silas' account, mercifully made brief, supper was served.

Billy might have offered his services then to either Nan or Sara Wells, for Stan and Ned Fenton were blocked up in the opposite corner, and could not at once reach them; but he slipped quietly past both to a spot where, a little out of the crowd, sat granny.

Her white hair was no softer than the delicate muslin cap that covered it, and her plain attire was dainty with careful touches. The happy excitement about her had made her as eager in enjoyment as a contented child. She caught Billy's arm with both her trembling hands and talked to him of her new "son-in-law," as she was pleased to call Silas. She laughed gleefully when Billy gallantly saluted her, declaring, if he could not get a chance to kiss the bride she would do quite as well; and after he brought her the kind and amount of supper she required, she murmured lovingly :

"You have always been such a comfort to me, Ben; but you never stutter now-a-days, do you — and you have grown so strong."

After supper came another hour or two of simple enjoyment.

"Go and talk to Sara Wells," said Nan to Billy, in her imperative tone and coaxing

smile. "She is one of the nicest girls you ever saw."

"I don't doubt it; but what shall I talk to her about? I don't know how to amuse young ladies, as Ned Fenton can."

"Amuse young ladies! A body would think she were a baby, and you had no rattle-box for her! Go and talk sense to her."

"Does Ned talk nothing but sense?"

"What Mr. Fenton talks is nothing to do with it. He adapts himself to everybody, and makes everything he says more or less entertaining."

"Yes, he does," returned Billy, with a humility so unusual that Nan gave him a sharp glance, which caused him to stammer out something about Miss Wells—that she might not care to make his acquaintance."

"She cares to know all my friends, and I have often spoken to her of you."

"I wonder what you have said of me?"

“Why, what would I be likely to say?” asked Nan, half pettishly: “I’ve told her about home, and you were naturally mentioned as one of us.”

Billy’s eyes grew suddenly soft, and he exclaimed warmly: “It is very kind in you, Nan, to say ‘one of us.’”

“What else should I say?”

“You might say truthfully: ‘the poor boy my father took out of charity — the ignorant, graceless cub, whom nobody cared a cent to save.’”

Nan, though only yesterday a child, was now woman enough to feel by one keen intuition that some new emotion was stirring in Billy. Probably his ambition was awakened and his pride touched; but how, she could not detect, from his own words. She had behind her well understood propensity to tease, her mother’s kind heart and her father’s good sense. Now therefore she looked directly into Billy’s face, saying: “I talk

of you as you are, and not as you were years ago ; you are not ignorant now, and you have plenty of friends. Don't be a goose, Billy, and get any poor spirited notions into your head."

The blood rushed into his face, his voice was low, but full of boyish eagerness, as he asked: "Tell me this truly, Nan. — If I make myself, by hard study and reading, to be really intelligent, if I am honest, industrious, and get on in the world, will good sensible people let my early life go for nothing against me?"

"My father was a poor boy, and he earned all his property, and worked hard for his education ; does anybody remember that against him?"

The young man's face was very bright, as he replied, "No, indeed!"

In a moment he continued, cheerfully, "I am glad to remember one thing ; my mother came from a respectable Scotch family, and

my father, when she married him, was a sober, decent man. I might have worse blood in my veins."

"Of course you ought to be glad of this; but what started you off on such a queer track at this late day? Go and talk now to Sara Wells, as I told you."

"I am very well contented."

"I am not. I want to go and plan for a skating-match with the others. Your roommate has promised to teach me some marvelous performances on the ice."

Billy retreated immediately, and let her seek the "others." He would not have obeyed her orders, however, had not Sara Wells made a little effort to come near and talk to him. She was indeed a thoroughly "nice" girl, and Billy forgot he could not "amuse" her. They were before long as animated as possible over a subject which Stan Ellery somewhat later discovered to be geometry, and great was his laughter. He

never talked mathematics at any girl, not he!

Stan always appeared to good advantage in a little company like this. Never troubled with bashfulness, he was free to talk with anybody or with everybody, individually and collectively. He was as dutiful as a son in his politeness to his aunt, while avoiding—when he could do so easily—his uncle. Stan was now his own master; but he chose to treat Mr. Ellery with the same old deference and outward respect. He never intended to forfeit any one's good opinion if he could retain it by such easy methods as smiles, bows and fair words. He was intemperate, he gambled, he had low associations; but he knew how to be a pleasant hypocrite, for he had learned the art early.

As he stood talking with Billy, his uncle was silently watching him. Young as he was, his face seemed to the older man to wear already the marks of drunkenness and sensuality. From studying Stan, he turned at

last to Billy ; and thinking of his sturdy struggles toward an honorable manhood, the farmer said to himself: " It passes my comprehension. Stan came of a pure ancestry. His earliest associations were refined and elevating. He has wealth, education and good manners ; yet his instincts all seem depraved. Billy, on the contrary, comes out of vileness, and is perpetually working up toward the best things he learns of in life and principle."

Mr. Ellery's reflections were here cut short by the breaking up of the festivities. The sleigh-load of young people departed noisily. Prissy and Silas shook hands with each guest, and received their parting congratulations. Billy lingered with the last, to give the bride a modest little present he had brought her, and had not wished displayed. He also slipped into granny's hand a small gift, which she smilingly accepted. It was an amiable whim of Billy to provide her with

a purse and to keep little sums of money in it. He liked to have her feel so "able to do anything," as she seemed to think herself when handling it. There was nothing about Billy that Stan Ellery found so "soft," as this: Billy's love for a "silly old grandmother, and not his own at that." Perhaps a third person might have discovered the nature of the difference between the young men, by reflecting on this softness in the rougher mannered one, and the inability to understand it in the one whose bearing was so gracious.

CHAPTER XII.

SNARED AND STRUGGLING.

DOCTOR HIGBEE approved of Billy. He did not have to hear from the lady of the house that he flirted with the cook, or made himself in any way obnoxious. He "minded his business, and was not a fool;" therefore the old man, having arrived at this conclusion, frequently gave him good advice, and interested himself in his aims and pursuits.

One day, as Billy was about leaving the office, he detained him by remarking: "You know Stan Ellery well, I suppose?"

"Not so much of him as you may think. I lived with his uncle while Stan was at the farm; lately I see him occasionally."

“He is going to the old boy,” said the doctor calmly, uncorking a vial and touching his tongue to its contents. The process being a satisfactory test, judging from the grimace he made, he calmly continued: “He’s going straight to the old boy—but he is going slowly. He started early, and he will be long enough on the way to rope in and ruin a dozen better fellows. He’ll drink, and stand it for years; he’ll gamble and win as a rule. He loves himself better than anybody else and isn’t going to do anything desperate, openly disgraceful. He’s fairly off for brains, and as for trickery and assurance,—well, if he escapes Congress it will be almost a miracle! You wonder how an old chap like me knows so much about a young one, don’t you? Perhaps I should admire him if I did not happen to be a doctor. He has dropped in here a few times, once with a sprained wrist, once with a sore throat; has chatted a little, asked no amount of advice, given me

no confidence, but I've read him through and through. I don't have to look at a body's stomach to tell that it is disordered—or his conscience, either."

If Billy could have proved the untruthfulness of any one statement made by the old doctor he would not have been silent; as it was, he held his peace for a while before he remarked: "I haven't any influence over him. He is older and better educated than I am. He has always treated me well, but I have no doubt he looks down on me as being greatly his inferior. It is perfectly natural that he should do so."

"Maybe. Oh, I had no idea of setting you on Stan Ellery's track. If there's any influence going, he'll be the one to exert it, and that brings me to the point. Ned Fenton is your room-mate, isn't he?"

"Yes, sir," returned Billy, a little anxiously: for as an outgrowth of their life together he was becoming much attached to Ned.

"I've known Ned Fenton ever since he used to sit in his father's study and play at sermon writing. He is a fine, strong fellow, with a quick brain, not powerful; he is sensitive, seems a little lazy now, but he will be terribly excitable or morbidly melancholy if his mind or body ever got over-wrought. I wish Stan Ellery would let him alone."

"I don't believe he has a very great deal to do with Ned."

"Would you know it if he did have? You are busy, and are seldom in your room until ten or eleven at night. I've seen them together constantly lately, and in fact more or less in one another's company for a year."

"Ned seldom talks of him."

"Stan might not care to have him talk of their doings to you, who visit at the Ellery farm so often."

"Ned does not seem deceitful."

"He is not, but he is secretive and reserved. He likes you and wants your good

opinion ; he would not lie to you, perhaps, but he will show you his better side. How does he keep up his studies ?”

“Fairly well,” said Billy, who, even as he replied, feared his qualified “well” was not quite as near the truth as “not at all well” would have been.

“Nevertheless, he is on the down grade, and I want you to see if he can’t be brought to know it in time. He has got a grand little mother who expects he is going to make her proud and happy all the days of her life. Just you corner him some day, and talk to him like a Dutch uncle. I’ve had my eye on him this long time ; but he knows it, and I can’t catch him. When I do he’ll get a shaking up. That will be for only once, however. What you can do is to watch and work right along, now while you are together. O thunder ! If there isn’t that plaster that ought to have been on Jerusha Peters’ back twenty-four hours ago ! Take it to her, and run

when she gets it, or she will scold a blue streak as long as you will stand and listen."

Billy did as he was bidden, revolving in his mind the doctor's words in regard to Ned. He recalled little things that now seemed to have some significance. Several times Ned had been away all night, when Billy had supposed he was at home.

The rules regulating the life of the "upper story boys," were very few, and not stringent. They must be in the building at school hours; must behave when there; must come home at a certain hour at night, if they came at all. It was a common occurrence for one to go home, if his home was near town, and to remain there over night. Billy had sometimes wondered why Ned was always irritable, moody, and half sick, after his visits, or what he supposed were such; at least, it had been so with him for many months. There had been a time when he used to tell Billy what he had done, whom he had seen, or

what had happened at the old homestead. He rarely did this now-a-days; yet when he had undeniably been home for a visit, he brought back some tangible proof of it, and was not cross or moody. He had become a great beer drinker, and this he admitted frankly, turning off with a jest, Billy's frequent comments on the habit. About mid-winter, he had declared that the pastor of the First Church, of which he was a member, was dull and behind the times. From random remarks on the subject, Billy had supposed he was attending church elsewhere; but this supposition might be without foundation.

For several days after Dr. Higbee had talked with him, Billy was not in his room at the same time with Ned; but one evening, about ten o'clock, the two found themselves together. Each had lessons to prepare, and so studied in silence for a while; then Billy, finishing his task, looked up to see Ned absorbed in gloomy thought.

"I say, Knox!" he exclaimed, abruptly, "relatives are great blessings, no doubt; but, in some respects, a chap like you, who is all there is of the family, is to be congratulated. You have no anxious friends to over-rate your ability, and to be tremendously disappointed if you fizzle all out. That's the contrariety of fortune, though; you, who have no doting aunts, or generous old grandfather, or blessed good mother—you will improve each shining hour, and make an out-and-out success of yourself."

"Are you making out your programme for a 'fizzle?'"

"I am not making out any programme at all; others have done it, and that is the bother. The fizzle will be accomplished without preparation."

"What do you mean?"

"My mother expects me to be a minister. Think of it!"

Ned gave a long, low laugh, which was

rather scornful than merry. As Billy said nothing, he added: "When I was a little fellow I had a sort of juvenile piety—ministers' children often have it early and recover—I talked about being like my father, and that settled the matter of my future."

"Have you lost all your religion?"

"Did you ever see any in my possession?"

No hardened or wholly indifferent person ever spoke so bitterly of himself as did Ned then, in tone if not in words. Billy pushed away his books, and coming near, said, warmly:

"If you had paraded your religion I should not have believed much in you. The main thing with me was whether you acted from good principles."

"My principles are excellent; my practice is variegated—highly so."

Billy flung his arm about Ned's shoulders, and giving him a friendly shake, asked sympathetically: "What are you about now-a-

days? I may not be a 'doting' friend, but I like you. I want to know why you think you may be a fizzle?"

"I shall not be ready for college—at least to enter as I expected. I have got into debt; not very badly, but for a fellow in the Academy it will be considered useless, and altogether bad."

"What sort of debt?"

"Oh, I borrowed money once or twice of Stan Ellery, and once or twice of a friend of his—a mean scalawag he is, too. I lost it all, of course."

"Gambling?"

"Well, it amounted to that, I suppose. The fact is, Knox, I have been going it pretty fast this winter. I have only myself to blame. I wanted to try a few things; but if Stan Ellery had not stuck to me, I might have slackened up somewhat."

"Shake free from him, Ned! Do it once and for all, and he'll let you alone. I know

Stan ; he will drag you into the mire, then wade through and out, leaving you to sink, or take care of yourself."

"He wallows in some ditches I never stepped into yet," returned Ned, emphatically.

"Very likely," assented Billy, adding : "but surely, you can easily give him up."

"I might—yes—but what if there was something else I could not easily give up?"

There was no reason that Billy should think of Nan, or any sense in supposing that Ned was thinking of her ; but it was with a sudden relief that Billy heard his companion say :

"You don't approve of my drinking beer so often?"

"No, it is a useless habit. I don't like to think you are so fond of it, and I don't believe that you need it."

"I am fond of it, but I will tell you what I like better," said Ned, grimly ; and in the

lamplight, his face suddenly flushed with shame. Some friendly instinct made Billy whisper, as he hesitated:

“You can trust me, old fellow!”

“Well, I like brandy—whiskey—rum, or anything of that sort, better than beer! I would like a drink this very minute. I knew you would look horrified, but it is the simple truth. A drinking man disgusts me; the name of drunkard sounds as ugly as ever—but I have got the love of drink in me. What do you think of that, for a boy not yet in college, and a future minister!”

“I think it is bad enough; but because you are a boy, and know the danger, the mischief can be stopped in time. You can cut yourself off from outside temptations easily enough, can’t you?”

“Perhaps,” said Ned, moodily.

“The hankering for stimulant you must fight.”

“I ought to, but I shall not.”

“ Haven’t you any pluck ?” cried Billy, with sudden vehemence.

“ No—not much on such lines. I could knock even you down, it may be, if I was pretty mad ; but I always do what I want to do, no matter how often I resolve not to give way. I am morally weak, and I know it.”

“ But don’t you realize that you must take yourself in hand at once, Ned ?”

“ I realize I won’t—or can’t—or shall not.”

There was something morbid in this moral languor of a fellow so gifted intellectually, and so well instructed spiritually. Billy’s bolder, braver nature was stirred to arouse the other one to resolution, to action ; but what appeal should he make that could avail ? Fenton was, in truth, miserably self-indulgent.

“ Ned, can’t you, by one mighty effort, will to do right ?”

“ Yes, and then, by many un-willings, do wrong.”

“But you will wreck your own boat before it is fairly launched.”

“I know it.”

The young fellow sat bent, his face between his hands; while Billy, too excited to keep quiet any longer, strode up and down the room. By-and-by the latter's steps grew slower, and he halted in deep thought; then again he came near to his companion, and speaking with visible effort, said:

“Last September, Ned, I began to pray, and now I believe in prayer. I accepted as true, to and for me, what I had always been told: that God for Christ's sake would forgive sins—that in life, my life, I could have help from heaven. I believe it all, for I have prayed, and my prayers have had answers. Now, the Bible plainly says God will give us help, strength, or wisdom, to the uttermost, if we are in dead earnest about wanting and seeking. I never yet have had a great struggle or a great temptation—at least, not

any like this that has come on you; and so I can't tell you what I have learned by experience—but Christians do say, Ned, they can always conquer, through Christ that strengthens them. Doesn't your own mother say that?"

"My mother would die if she knew me as I really am—she calls me her 'good son,'" said Ned, the big tears rushing to his eyes. He was a tender-hearted boy, after all, and Billy's previous words had touched him deeply. He knew that when he himself was studying his Bible on his father's knee, Billy must have been a homeless, fatherless waif. The older Billy had always seemed to him like an honest young giant; strong, clean-tongued, but without much sentiment of any sort. To-night, he revealed himself to Ned as tender and reverent, as having entered a purer, better atmosphere. Won by his sympathy, Ned now confessed, as he might have done to a brother, all the error and

waywardness of the past months. It was all worse than Billy's worst fancies; but the talk did them both good, if for no other reason than that it renewed Ned's waning faith in another's rectitude; and it awakened in Billy a hearty, brotherly affection, as well as a half fear, half gladness, that, in a sense, he was his brother's keeper. From that time on, during the winter, he tried, by every means in his power, to stimulate Ned's healthier impulses, and to shield him from temptations. He prevailed on him to renew his former habits of thorough study, and urged his going home when he would not otherwise have gone. He was sure Ned would not seek out Stan Ellery, and, because he never encountered the latter in their room after that night's conversation, he trusted that the old spell was broken.

It had been Billy's habit to spend some part of his time between each Friday night and Monday morning, at the farm.

Mrs. Ellery urged this on him, and he was only too happy to avail himself of her hospitality. Nan was usually at home, and this fact was no drawback to his enjoyment. The young girl snubbed him frequently, and criticised him freely; but then again, she talked with him, long at a time, of her school, her friends, and the thousand and one interests of her bright young life.

About the time of Prissy's wedding, Nan began to treat Billy rather coolly, or, at least, with a new formality and reserve. He noticed it at once, and felt it keenly; puzzling much whether it meant dislike, disdain, or a cold-blooded recognition of the fact, that their social relations must, for the future, be re-arranged, and that on a new basis. He was inclined to think this last was the true explanation.

Ned Fenton, when once introduced by Stan Ellery into the little circle of Nan's school-friends, had become very popular.

Nan herself often spoke of him as being so "witty, so entertaining in conversation, and such a gentleman by birth and breeding." Billy always heartily agreed with her, while he winced inwardly at something he fancied implied in this last phrase. Would Nan ever have any great approval for a man totally unlike Ned; not graceful, not white-handed, not always sure of the neatest way of doing, saying, and handling everything—only a fellow with a clear head, a big heart, and a conscience kept in good repair?

After the interview with Ned Fenton, Billy spent more of his spare time with him, and several Saturdays, when he would otherwise have been at the farm, he attached himself to Fenton. Once Fenton went with him to the Ellerys' for the day; a number of young people having been invited to the farm for a kind of informal merry-making. Ned had been doing remarkably well in his

studies for a few weeks, and was in unusually high spirits.

"Any mother must be proud of that bright, handsome fellow," said Mrs. Ellery to Billy, during the day.

"And he is as good as he looks," exclaimed Sara Wells, adding: "he is going to be a minister, I hear."

"Is he, Billy?" asked Nan, musingly.

"His people have hoped he would be one; that is a long way ahead," was the reply.

"He is wise. If I were a young man I would choose a profession," was Nan's comment.

As Ned joined them that moment, and Billy saw the cordial hearing Nan gave to his every gay remark, he felt a strange discomfort. He said to himself that they were all three of them too young for 'nonsense.' Some day he, Billy Knox, might be thinking of a wife; just now, what was it to him that Nan Ellery was as fresh and sweet as a crisp

pink rose-bud? But why had not Ned Fenton just as good a right to think this of her, as he had to consider it an original discovery? Not once did it occur to him that he had it in his power to injure Ned in the eyes of any who thought him better and stronger than Billy knew him to be. Later in the day, when the party came to an end, Ned and Billy rode back to town together. On the way Ned, who had been whistling softly to himself, forgetful of his companion, stopped, saying: "Miss Ellery is a charming girl—as soft and as frolicsome as a kitten, and as able to scratch you, in the prettiest fashion possible, if she feels like it."

Billy said something not intelligible.

"I have seen a great deal of her at the skating rink, and at one place and another, this winter. Stan has let me do his duty as her escort, when he had what he considered more exciting amusement. She is quite exciting enough for me."

Billy had nothing to say, whatever he might have thought, so Ned went on: "If I were what I ought to be—a model young student—I would surely follow her up until she promised to wait and marry me some fine day; but, you see, I can't count on myself."

"Then you had better let her alone."

"I know it, but I like her, and it pleases me to show her I do."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Billy, hotly.

"I suppose so—on very many accounts."

"Her parents consider her a child."

"Well, she is not; but I don't intend to ask for her so long as I am not of age, and my grandfather is paying my school-bills, and nobody knows who is going to pay some others."

"You are not good enough now, for Nan Ellery, and I don't think you ever will be," persisted Billy.

"Well, you are honest, and maybe you are right," returned Ned, lazily; adding, with more animation, in a moment: "She likes me pretty well, anyway."

The rest of the ride was taken in silence.

The winter went swiftly by, then the Easter holidays came and passed. Billy had made excellent progress in his studies; had become a great favorite with scholars, and teachers, and even with Doctor Higbee. He had found time, over and above his daily tasks, to attend a few lectures on popular science and literature, and he had begun a systematic course of reading.

During the spring holidays Billy was at work on the farm, and so saw nothing of Ned; but when he came back to school, he guessed by the sullen, uncommunicative manner of his room-mate, that his vacation had been worse than unprofitable. He knew nothing for certain, however, until he one day encountered Uncle Zeph in a deserted class-

room. The old man drew him into a corner, and whispered:

“I did something the other night that I can’t do again—no, never! I did it partly out o’ liking for you, and partly because the other fellow is as civil and as nice a one, in the main, as ever I saw in the ‘Cademy.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean Fenton,” returned Uncle Zeph, solemnly shaking his head. “I’ll tell you how ’twas. The boys all know that the last thing at night I see to the fires. Well, the last day of school I run ’em sort of low, but the fire in the biggest heater didn’t go out until next day; so I let it be, locked up, and went way until night; then I came around to see if everything was right, and no danger nor nothing. It was after eleven before I started for home; and just as I got to the front hall, ready to leave the building, there came the awfulest banging on the door, and then something tumbled against

it. I was kind o' scart, but I opened and peeked out. As I did it a feller took to his heels down the gravel walk, leaving another one in a heap on the top door step. If you'll believe it, there was Ned Fenton, drunk! Such a thing never happened in these here halls of learning ne—ver! I couldn't seem to believe my own eyes. He could stagger up-stairs leaning on me, and he did, tho' we took a pretty considerable time, and I preached temperance lectures on every landing, all out o' breath as I naturally was, and he only sense enough to take me for a prayer-meeting, and a saying 'Amen,' to every blessed sentence. I got him onto his bed, and I dar'n't leave him for the night, to go to fooling, maybe, later, with matches or a kerosene lamp; so I rolled myself into your place and dozed. He slept like a log; but when morning come you never saw a fellow madder at himself or meeker to hear reason. He begged me

never to tell a human being unless it was you. He didn't excuse himself or tell whose legs them was that I saw clipping down the front walk, but I knew them for Stan Ellery's, all the same."

"Now, aint this here awful? It never must happen again! What'd the trustees say to me for helping drunken fellers to bed! The reputation of the institution can't suffer in that sort of a way."

Billy was not so anxious about the 'institution,' as he was shocked at Ned's behavior. Uncle Zeph, perceiving this in a moment, added: "Yes, you may well groan; and that wasn't the worst of it, either. Ned wanted to stay in his room until noon, he said. His head ached and he had some things to do; so I left him and came back to lock up. I was climbing the stairs when I heard light steps behind me, and the softest voiced, mildest faced lady, with a worried little tremble in her way of speaking. She

says to me: 'Is my son in his room? I mean Ned Fenton.'

"I says: 'He was, but now perhaps he's gone.'

" 'He staid here all night last night, didn't he?'

"Yes marm, but I heard him say he was going home to-day.'

" 'Certainly he is—the foolish fellow, to stay here poring over his books. I presume,' says she, 'that he was so interested in some study he never remembered it was vacation. His father was just about as absorbed when he was over his sermons.'

"Well, when we got up, sure enough, Ned was there, washed and tidied up ready to go. They left the door wide open and I could hear her kind of lovingly scolding him for studying too hard, and telling how late she sat up for him the night before. She went looking all about his room, laughing at the contrivances, and showing just how proud she

was of him. She said she was glad to hear from one of the teachers what a steady feller you was, for she didn't want her boy daily exposed to evil companionship. Ned spoke up, and says he: 'Billy Knox is worth a dozen chaps like me.' She only laughed at that, like a young girl."

"It is a wretched business," said Billy, sadly, "and what to do I cannot tell. He must stop or be stopped, but how?"

There was a loud call in the hall for Uncle Zeph, who departed, first exclaiming: "You may well ask 'how!'"

That night Billy had one more long talk with Ned, who promised to do anything and everything in the way of thorough reform. He was humble and sorry, ashamed and melancholy; but Billy rightly judged that, pliable as he was in his hands, just so easily turned would he be in Stan Ellery's. Anew he resolved to watch over him for good; but what sort of a manhood would that be which must

be kept from evil by an outside human power, because before evil it would surely fall?

The spring went by, and there remained only three more weeks of the last term. Ned had applied himself to study for a number of months, and worked until late into each night. He made up so many of his neglected back tasks, that it seemed possible for him to enter college in the class he had earlier meant to join; at least it would be possible, after some work done in vacation.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRUGGLE ENDED.

ONE Friday night Ned Fenton insisted on taking Billy home with him for a brief visit. The fine old homestead belonging to his mother's father was only five miles from the town, and Billy had accepted his invitation with satisfaction and a desire to see a place of which he had heard considerable. It was a larger house and more elegant than Billy had supposed it to be. Mrs. Fenton was very polite, in a hearty, sincere way, and old Mr. Holmes seemed so genial he soon felt at ease. The pictures of foreign buildings, the fine library, and the beautiful conservatory, were of great interest to him. Ned could not have treated a most distin-

guished guest with more attention, while the fact that Ned liked him was reason enough for his securing the good opinion of every person about the establishment. This visit has no particular significance as a part of our story, but one little thing pleased Billy at the time, and was never afterwards forgotten.

In the evening, by bright moonlight, they strolled out for a walk about the grounds.

“Grandfather approves of you,” said Ned, lightly: “he never shows his coat-of-arms to people he does not care to please as well as to instruct; for of course it is edifying to you to learn our pedigree.”

“Well, a coat-of-arms is a fine thing, though I have seen the time a coat for my arms was much more to the purpose. Your grandfather is a splendid looking old gentleman.”

“Yes, he has backbone literally and figuratively. If he knew the flabbiness of his

grandson, he would appoint you his guardian, from this time forth. What am I going to do without you, Billy? In a few days you go one way, and I another."

"I have done you no real good. If your backbone were any stiffer for having known me, that would be something."

"You have given me a good example of pluck and principle. I have resolved to try and stand on my own feet—to 'pray devoutly and hammer away stoutly,' as Sancho Panza says."

"Really to do both?" asked Billy.

"Yes—both," returned Ned, soberly.

He had never before promised to pray; neither had he ever talked with Billy of religious matters. He always listened to any word on them from him respectfully, although he knew all that any one could say; so to-night, Billy only grasped his hand a moment, then they wandered on in the soft evening light.

The whole family urged Billy to stay over Sunday ; but he declined, wishing to spend that time at the farm. He was back at the Academy promptly Monday morning ; but not so was Fenton, whose non-appearance during the day caused his room-mate some anxiety. In the early evening he came ; his face was flushed, and his eyes very red. He smiled faintly at Billy's first unguarded look of suspicion, and sinking into a chair, said :

"I came straight from home, and I have not eaten a mouthful to-day ; but I have drunk unlimited ice water and lemonade. My head aches outrageously. I walked into town, hoping I should feel better, but I don't."

"You might as well have staid home until morning. Perhaps a night's sleep would have brought you out all right," said Billy, who was about going to Doctor Higbee's office. "Don't go to digging into Greek," he called back, as he went down the hall. A dismal groan was Ned's only reply.

No books were on the table when Billy returned, and Ned was in bed, but not asleep. He said he had a chill after Billy left him, but now he had, evidently, much fever. Neither of them knew anything about sickness; but when Billy saw how much redder Ned's face had become, and how bright were his eyes, he proposed to him that he should return and get Doctor Higbee. To this Ned would not hear; and so, after rendering his room-mate such small services as he permitted, Billy fell asleep and, after a hard day's work, slept soundly. It was six o'clock in the morning when he awakened. The sunshine filled the room, and his first thought was that the merry warble of bird-song had startled him out of sleep; but no—Ned, erect in bed, was violently gesticulating and talking rapidly of his mother and a pyramid. It must be lifted off her head, but nobody would help him do it. Then, as Billy stared at him in dismay, he shouted

with laughter, and would have leaped toward the door.

Billy, with a struggle, urged him back into bed, and pounded loudly with his fists on the wall, calling to the inmates of the next room for help. For a moment or two, their neighbors supposed them engaged in some riotous sport; but at last Billy made them understand he needed them. As soon as they came in, they agreed that Billy should go at once for the doctor, while they remained with Fenton. Accordingly, he hurried over to the office, and knowing Doctor Higbee's peculiarities, would not return without him.

"Been off on a spree, I presume," grumbled the old fellow, stumbling up the worn staircases.

"No, he has not. I know how he has spent every hour for weeks," returned Billy, following the doctor into the room. Ned paid no attention to the latter, save once to cry

out, as with pain, when he laid his hand over his scalp. The doctor examined him carefully, and Billy, who, by this time, was well able to read the old man's face, and guess at his opinions, understood that Ned's case was a serious one, even in this early stage. When the doctor spoke at last, he turned to Billy, saying :

"His pulse is a hundred and sixty."

"Can he be moved—be taken home?"

"No ! You must send for his mother, and she must have a strong man nurse."

"Can't I do what a man would be needed for?" asked Billy.

"With any of us fellows to take our turn?" added the others, in a breath.

"Well, to begin with, you can try ; but you must keep this part of the building perfectly quiet. His hearing will be morbidly acute, and loud noises will be agony to him ; slight ones almost unendurable."

“What ails him, doctor?” Billy ventured to inquire.

“An acute cerebral trouble. You must not leave him a moment; he will have all sorts of hallucinations, and you must keep him from injuring himself until the delirium becomes more subdued, as it will, with the advance of the disease.”

“How long will the disease run?”

“Perhaps two weeks, or three—perhaps not half as long. Now, some of you fellows go get things into shape. Clear out these upper rooms, anybody who will make the least noise. There must be no tramping through halls, no whispering outside the doors. You might as well know that Fenton will have a hard fight for life.”

Morton and Bridges, the two friends, went out softly, leaving Billy with the doctor, who turned then to him, and asked:

“Has he been drinking?”

“Not for two or three months; but he has

studied very closely, by night and day, to make up for what he lost in the winter.

“Well, he is in for it now; but keep his mother cool, if you can. She will naturally worry to have him moved home; but it can’t be done, or thought of. Get her here at once.”

It was a rare thing for the doctor to stay with his patients, but he remained with Ned half the forenoon, and until his mother came; then, when he went, it was to return at regular and not infrequent intervals.

Such strange nights and days those were that followed. By Billy only, would Ned let himself be controlled, and that settled the question of a nurse. The other boys were as kind as brothers could have been. Mrs. Fenton was not a woman who had to be “kept cool,” for, from the moment she entered the room, with her face colorless from fear, she was as calm and self-restrained as if she had known all Ned’s danger.

At first Ned talked incessantly of Greek, of Latin, of skating, of terrible dangers he could not escape; sometimes confusing the struggle against evil, with literal fights against present enemies; often repeating the very phrases used in some past discussion, which Billy well remembered. Gradually the wildness of his delirium passed away, and he would lie for short intervals quiet, in the dim light of the silent room. He recognized his mother and smiled; to Billy, he murmured short sentences that seemed not without connection and thought. That last moonlight Saturday night seemed constantly in his mind, and always associated with some spiritual exercise — some “prayer,” some “help to the uttermost, you know you said,” he would whisper to Billy.

Doctor Higbee brought all his skill to bear on the case, in a way that more than once recalled to Billy, Uncle Zeph’s account of his peculiarities; but he was so quiet, he

blustered so little, and joked so seldom, that his gravity was ominous.

There came a time when Ned, to his mother's intense relief, fell into profound slumbers, and, on awakening, was apparently perfectly aware of their presence—able to listen to them and reply. She assured Billy that this sleep must certainly work for his recovery; but it began to seem to the other watchers much like stupor. One midnight they heard him mutter:

“I pray—I pray!”

“For what, my son?” said his mother, bending low over the bed. He waited before he could get out slowly: “If I should die—before I wake—my soul to take.”

“He is wandering a little, and remembering a child's prayer,” she explained to Billy; and then, at the latter's urgent request, she went away for a brief rest. In the morning she said it seemed so good to have Ned quiet, but she did not see what Doctor Hig-

bee showed to Billy: the paralysis of the eyelids, the slow, irregular pulse, in short the coming on of complete insensibility. She waited for hours, expecting him to awake; and at last the doctor had to tell her, as gently as he could, that all consciousness was gone, and almost all life from the boy who was her idol. Her grief was as the grief of all mothers with their dead; and to Billy it was infinitely touching. The little that he could do for her, he did, so tenderly, that she trusted him to carry out all her wishes.

No funeral could have been simpler or more solemn. The services were held in the great school-room, and two hundred school-mates followed with uncovered heads the coffin, carried down the long avenue, under the budding trees. It was all as unreal as a dream to one of them. He could shut out the sight of these black badges, and hear Ned's voice in their sunny room as he sang

some gay college song, or he could see him with bent head, as he sat melancholy after some confession of wrong doing. He could not think of his body, cold and motionless—his soul gone away out of all earthly temptation, out of all struggle. The poor lad had truly struggled, and Billy was glad that he could remember tears and promises and prayers: for if he pitied and loved the erring boy, was not God more pitiful? Perhaps it was in purest mercy God had sent the blow on this mother; for it may be that death, not life, could best save her son. Sooner or later her heart might have been wrung by his weakness and backslidings; now she would always keep him in her memory as in her loving ignorance she fancied him to have been.

Billy wondered if it were wrong to be sincerely glad that very few people knew of poor Ned's failings and follies, and that those few would be likely to guard their secret.

There was only one week more of the school term after Ned's death; a fact for which Billy was very grateful. He was overwrought, and needed rest, after a year of severe study and the recent drain on his sympathies. It rested him only to think of out-of-door work, of getting away from books and from the little upper room so full of sad associations.

As he was packing his boxes the last day, a shadow darkened the threshold, and looking up, Billy saw Stan Ellery, as gracious and cheerful as ever. He flung himself into a chair, tossed a cigar-end out of the open window, and after a few careless remarks, exclaimed: "Ned told me once that you knew he was in debt to me and to another fellow."

"Yes, I knew it; but see here, Stan Ellery, are you going to bring more trouble on his mother? She is almost crushed by her loss, anyway, but you don't know the

satisfaction it is to her to tell people what a good boy he was. Now, if you go and show up to her every miserable slip in this last year of his life, you make her utterly wretched. You take away her comfort."

"Oh, hold up, Billy! Don't fly off at a tangent. All I came in for was to tell you to keep your own mouth shut on this matter. I have settled with the other fellow, and never expect my money back. Let his mother believe he was a newer edition of his father the parson. Ned was a good-hearted fellow as ever was."

"I don't know how long he would have been so if"— Billy said this much and stopped. What was the use of talking to Stan?

"If I had had much to do with him, you mean," continued Stan himself. "Oh, I didn't hurt him. He had been held in too long, and when he once started he didn't know when to stop. He cut me three months ago, and I did not follow him up."

I say, Billy, arn't you turning out rather more pious than one would expect from your earliest training?"

"Perhaps. How about your early training, and your present going?"

Stan gave a boisterous laugh, and made ready to leave him, saying: "Well, I am not such a Jew as you seemed to expect I would be in regard to these debts. Going over to the farm to-day? Give my love to Nan, she is getting most mighty pretty. Ned was a liittle soft on her—don't know the state of her heart. Good-bye, old chap."

Billy could not help wondering, as Stan went whistling down the old stairs, if he were acting out of generosity and kindness, or if it seemed to Stan as well not to bring to light his own share in Ned's transactions.

The books were all packed at last, all movable articles were sent away, and by night Billy was ready to leave forever the place in which he had learned much and experienced

more. As he stood in the door, looking back into the room, darkening with the night-fall, he remembered with a thrill his late friend saying: "In a few days you go one way and I another."

Ned's way had led him into eternity. Whither did his own steps turn? He could not tell, but one thing he realized: his own boyhood was past—it was time that he should go out into the world and become a man among men.

CHAPTER XIV.

A NEW DEPARTURE.

ONE beautiful day in early spring, the sun shone brightly in at the windows of what had once been Peter's cottage; but shiftless Peter never would have recognized his old home, save by the landscape around. Silas Barnard had already added a new kitchen, for Prissy was a famous housekeeper, and wanted plenty of room for all her cooking utensils and her domestic operations. How every pot and pan did shine to-day in the bright sunshine, while Prissy, her cheeks as red as ever, hovered over the fire, frying doughnuts. Si had added another room, and this last was a nursery. The arrival of the twins made such an apartment as necessary

as the new kitchen. Five years had come and gone since Silas took Prissy for better or for worse; the twins were bouncing children, a boy and a girl, or Jack and Jill, as Si persisted in calling them.

There was, moreover, a baby. It was a good baby, healthy and perfect in all its members, but a more grotesque little mortal never flourished. Prissy and Si thought it decidedly pretty; but as it sat this day, cross-legged on the floor, howling lustily for the hot doughnuts Prissy would not bestow on it, it looked like nothing but a Chinese idol. Well, as the sun shone and the baby screeched, and Prissy placidly warbled a hymn, the outer door opened and in walked William Knox.

“Where is Si, Prissy?”

“He will be in soon; he drove over to Langham, but it is time he was home.”

“Well, I can wait a while for refreshments,” said the young man, laughing, as he

secured two big cakes from the pan by the stove, and biting one, added: "You can cook a few things, Prissy, can't you?"

"Impudence! What did you seize the very hottest ones just from the fat for? Si does that, too, instead of taking cool ones, which must be much more digestible."

"Phew! I can digest a cannon ball."

"I believe you could. Why don't you get married, Billy? Then you would not have to come eating up your neighbors' cakes; your wife would make them for you."

"That would not be so economical, by half," replied Billy, sitting down near the "idol," whom he swooped up, perched on his knee, and silenced by filling its wide mouth with cake. Prissy, glad of the quiet, and unaware of the way it had been secured, went on talking:

"I declare, Billy, you are big enough to take care of a wife. I thought last Sunday, when you stood up to sing, you looked

exactly like Goliath in our illustrated family Bible."

"Don't you like big men?"

"Yes, I do! I wish Si was twice as large as he is! I suppose a big fellow may be a scoundrel, but I always was of the opinion that, as a rule, he wouldn't have so many meannesses as a little one. A regular giant might get mad and toss his wife out of the window, but he ain't half so likely to count the potatoes she may cook for dinner, as if he were under weight. You see, Billy, the potato counter's wife has to despise his stinginess; but the chances are the big chap's wife will tell the neighbors she fell out that window, and she will forgive him before her bones are set."

"Indeed! Why, Prissy, how you make me realize my prospective privileges. But it is too bad Si counts the potatoes—and are they small potatoes, too?"

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Billy

Knox! Si isn't so very small, and I can tell you, his heart is almost as big as his body."

"Isn't that a little rough on his lungs, liver, and so forth?" quoth Billy, grasping out for another cake.

The hot lard began to scorch, and Prissy, taking it hastily off the fire, paid no more attention to her visitor for a while. He amused himself easily; ate more cake, tumbled the idol around in a sacrilegious way, told Prissy its head was going to be redder than ever his was, and its countenance by no means as handsome: finally he exclaimed:

"I have come to tell you and Si a secret."

"You are going to be married!" cried Prissy, turning square around and gazing at the young man, who colored a little as he returned:

"Can't a woman conceive of any other sort of a secret?"

"Of course she can; but why don't you be—be—looking out for a wife?"

“First, because I don’t know a girl whom I would marry, who would marry me.”—Billy paused a second, as if he would give Prissy a chance to deny that, if she could; then he continued: “Secondly, I could not support a wife yet, if I had one. I don’t mean this to be true a great many years, however.”

For reasons best known to her shrewd self, it was particularly malicious just then, for Prissy to remark, with hypocritical sympathy:

“Yes, get a good start first, and then find some nice, sensible poor girl, used to economy, or to taking care of herself; then you will get on slowly and surely.”

When she had turned away, Billy suggested with would-be carelessness:

“What if I didn’t happen to want a poor girl?”

“Gracious me! Would you marry a woman for her money?”

“No!” retorted Billy, savagely, and giving the idol a start that nearly knocked it off its base. I wish the woman I want—I mean, I hope”—

The idol howled outright, as no real idol, however heathenish, ever does howl; and Prissy snatched it away from Billy, declaring that he poked it as if it were made of putty and had no feelings whatever. In the excitement of this episode the subject last considered was allowed to drop, and the secret was forgotten until Si came home.

In the years since we last saw Billy, he had remained with Mr. Ellery, until this, his twenty-second year. He had laid up several hundred dollars, but, better still, he had mastered every detail of farm work. Never was there a more steady-going, faithful worker about a farm than Silas Barnard; but Mr. Ellery often smiled at the difference between Silas and Billy. The one was content to work with a tool handed down from his

grandfather; the other was progressive in the best sense of the word, applied to farming. Billy studied papers devoted to agriculture; Silas pronounced them full of new-fangled notions.

Mr. Ellery had several times allowed Billy to try experiments, which, in the end, proved him to be decidedly clear-headed. He never undertook anything of importance without consulting Mr. Ellery; he valued Silas' assistance highly, but his advice, not at all.

Silas did not return until nearly supper time. He had taken with him the twins, who came back so hungry they smelt the doughnuts at the gate, and began asking for them on the door-steps. Naturally there was not much time for conversation until supper was eaten and the juvenile element banished; then, while Prissy sat down to darn stockings, Silas and Billy chatted about various matters. At last Billy said:

"Haywood has bought this next farm, Si."

"I know it; but he means to sell it again the first chance, I hear. I always wondered Ellery didn't buy it. There isn't a prettier farm in the county, and it lies so close to his."

"He did not want all of it, and nobody has ever wanted to divide it."

"Well, if I had the wherewith to take that land, I wouldn't ask anything nicer," returned Si.

"What would you say to my buying that farm?" asked Billy.

He spoke lightly, but something in his tone made the other man look up and reply:

"I should say: good for you, Billy Knox! But how could you do it? Has some long-lost relative left you a fortune?"

Leaning forward on the table, the young man exclaimed: "I came over on purpose to tell you my plans, for I really have had

an idea of taking that farm. It is high time I started out a little bolder, and entirely independent of Mr. Ellery. Haywood is a capitalist, a straightforward, honest fellow, known to Mr. Ellery. He wanted him to add this farm to his, but he wouldn't hear to that—didn't want it. While the two were talking about the farm one day last month, it just occurred to me that I could do that—that is, buy the farm, even if I couldn't pay all cash down. When I suggested the thing to Mr. Ellery, he approved of it heartily; so nothing remained but to talk with Haywood, and come to an agreement. There is just one hundred acres, at fifty dollars an acre—and I have taken it."

Silas gave a prolonged whistle, and Prissy waved a half-darned stocking in the air, crying:

"So that is your secret, is it? A farm, not a wife—well, one will follow the other!"

"We have talked over and settled every sin-

gle thing, Haywood and I," continued Billy, talking faster, with pleasure at their enthusiasm. "I paid five hundred dollars down. He dictates what crops, how many acres for meadow and pasture, how many are to be plowed and planted to corn, beans, and potatoes, and how many sown to oats and barley. We each furnish one-half the seed, and when the crops are marketed, the proceeds are to be equally divided."

"How about live stock and tools?"

"I have more than enough money in the bank to get all I want for a good start after my first payment. I only lack one thing."

"What is that?"

"Si Barnard."

"What?"

"You. I must have you."

"But what will Mr. Ellery say to that?"

"He says 'yes.' We talked it over the first thing; he says he has had your services a long time, and can get along now without

you, for he knows I will need you more. Another thing, I want Prissy to take me to board. I mean to set myself up as independently as possible of my very best friends, so that they won't feel a bit of responsibility about me. I told Mr. Ellery this morning, that when once I was fairly started, I should not be running to him for help or advice, and if I did not, he must understand the reason why, and not imagine I was taking on airs."

"Well, the hull thing is downright sensible," said Silas; "but it is kind of amazin', all the same, considerin' it isn't so very long since you came over the fence, yourself, into that potato patch."

Billy laughed; then, glancing at Prissy, he remarked: "Did you ever count the potatoes a woman cooks for dinner?"

"Billy!" began Prissy, indignantly; but Silas placidly answered:

"No, never! Won't they cook an odd number? They are an awful superstitious

set—women are, generally speaking. However, I have noticed one thing: Prissy knows how to pare a thin skin off a potater and not waste half. It comes of cutting neat as a dressmak”—

But Billy was shaking his finger at Mrs. Barnard, and saying: “Poor Prissy! If he’d only been a little bigger he never would have known it.”

“If I was going to buy a farm,” cried Prissy, “I’d cultivate some dignity, Billy”—

“It can’t be a profitable crop, for Haywood didn’t speak of it,” retorted Billy; and then, returning to business, he went on.

“This year, to begin with, Si, we will have twenty-five acres barley.”

“Yes, there is where the money will be made—there, and on the beans; but there is no such easy paying crop as barley.”

“Nothing to equal it,” assented Billy, adding: “then fifteen acres for beans, ten for corn, five for potatoes, and five for oats.

We will mow and pasture the rest of the farm."

Silas, by this time, was greatly interested, and the rest of the evening was spent in lively discussions, which, practical and sensible as they undoubtedly were, would have no interest for the reader. Suffice it to say, all satisfactory arrangements for board, and for Silas' services, were made before Billy left the little home, at what was an unusually late hour for its inmates.

He felt a new delight in life, and an honest pride in the thought of being a land-owner. Just within the boundary line of his new farm, stood the scroggy old tree in which the balloon had once been entangled. Billy, seeing its dark outlines in the clear starlight, smiled to himself, saying:

"I certainly alighted on this farm early in life. It ought to be mine by right of discovery. Little Ben was sound when he counselled me to do my work out in the sunshine.

I can almost hear him stutter as he did that night granny slept in her chair by the fire, and we danced about her like mad things. Dear old granny! I wonder if she has found Ben? If so, she must have wondered to see him in heaven, when she supposed she left him on earth."

Yes, granny had gone out from the cottage that had sheltered her so long. The year after Prissy married, she found her, one lovely summer afternoon, sitting with hands quietly folded, and her face as pleasant as a happy child—but quite dead.

CHAPTER XV.

A FADED RAINBOW.

IT was a warm pleasant evening in the latter part of May, and Silas Barnard and his wife were enjoying an hour of rest after a busy day. It was Si's habit at this time to take down his old fiddle and play a few lively tunes for Jack and Jill, who, if they were not like their namesakes, perpetually tumbling down hill, were always in motion, and ready for music. This night, however, after he had played 'Bonnie Doon,' and the 'Arkansas Traveller,' he dropped his bow, saying, "I'm beat out; we did a big day's work to-day; we drilled our last acre of barley."

"Whereabouts have you sown it?" asked Prissy.

"The four-rowed we put on that land, nearest Ellery's, the two-rowed is just south of it. Where is Billy to-night? Oh, I know; he said he was going over to see Ellery about something or other."

"Anything very important?" asked Prissy, with a knowing smile, which was lost on Silas, who was rather dull in some respects.

"Well, if he was as tired as I am, he wouldn't think anything important but his night's rest. He has worked as hard, certainly."

"Nan has come home."

"Has she?" asked Si, with innocent interest; "and how does she look? Where has she been this long time, anyway?"

"Why, Si Barnard, if I have told you that once I have told you a dozen times over."

"Well now, Prissy, do you want me to be keeping track of every pretty girl in the

neighborhood? After the worry I had with you, I'm glad to let my mind sort o' settle."

"I should think you had better! For a cool-blooded creature you did use to get into an awful ferment. Nan Ellery has been teaching school in a ladies' seminary about one hundred miles from here."

"What an idea! With all their money, is she going to earn her livin'?"

"That aint it at all. You knew what great friends she was with that Miss Sara Wells. She was teaching in this school and got sick. Nan went to keep her place for her till she got well; then Mrs. Ellery said she was so interested in some lectures or other on literature—Nan was—she wanted to stay and enjoy them and Sara's companionship. Mrs. Ellery don't need her at home, and it must be a little dull for a lively girl out here in the country."

"She is a country girl, and ought to be contented at home," said Silas.

“And so she is, as happy as a lark when she is home. I was up there this afternoon, and I declare, she does get prettier every day of her life. Her dress was only a pink cambric, that didn’t cost over ten cents a yard; but her cheeks were pinker yet, and her eyes just snap, or laugh, or sparkle, according to what she is saying or thinking.”

“Yes, she is a nice girl, Nan is,” said Si, with a long yawn; “but I’m so dead tired I’ll just go to bed. It does pass my understanding, what Billy was in such a taking to go over and ask about that old wagon for, when Ellery has been willing to sell it any time this twelve-month.”

As he shuffled off, with another jaw-breaking yawn, Prissy soliloquized: “It passes my understanding how a man can be so dumb over the very next man’s love affairs, and the very one too who was so long-sighted in seeing reasons for coming over here, when he wanted to see somebody. Such far-

fetches excuses as he'd get up! I kind o' blushed for him, once in a while. Not as I want him to see through Billy, either, for poor chap, he's aiming too high, I fancy, and he never 'll want anybody to see him writhe, if he only succeeds in hurting himself. Here, you two children, what do you mean by carousing around after your own father is in bed? Come here, directly, and let me undress you!"

The twins, who were doing nothing more riotous than throwing grass at one another, came meekly, and were put away for the night.

Yes, Billy had gone over to the Ellerys', after bestowing more care on his personal appearance, than might have been expected from a tired farmer going to see his neighbor on business. He found Mr. Ellery on the piazza, and seated himself near by.

The new farm was a fruitful subject for long conversations, and there was but one

thing in the world more interesting to the young man, so all was well. It would have been better for him, perhaps, if he could have said, plainly: "Where is your daughter, Mr. Ellery, I want to see her?" but he could not. Instead, he listened to every footstep in the hall behind them, and lost all of a long remark of Mr. Ellery's on last year's potato bugs, because he heard Nan singing.

By-and-by there was a rustle, a sweep of skirts down-stairs, and she came out on the piazza in the soft light. She immediately held out her hand to Billy in a cordial greeting, and leaning against a post of the piazza, exclaimed:

"They tell me you are branching out greatly; and I suppose it is settled for all time, now, that you are to be a farmer?"

"I suppose so; wouldn't you have done the same in my place?"

"Perhaps. I have never thought any-

thing about it. It certainly isn't a very exciting life."

"Well, I have managed not to stagnate," said Mr. Ellery. "In fact, I've been stirred up several times since I began farming."

"Oh, you are an exceptional man, as any one would know who had ever seen your only daughter," laughed Nan, patting his gray hair.

"You are a goose at this state of your existence," returned her father, jocosely, continuing: "In her secret soul, Billy, she would like it better in both of us, if we blacked our boots, and put on stove-pipe hats when we plowed; perfumed our handkerchiefs, and carried Tennyson's poems in our coat-tail pockets, to read in shady places. There is a college professor in there," he went on, mischievously, dropping his voice to a whisper, and pointing toward the sitting-room; "and he has been picking his way all over the farm to-day, reciting poetry

to Sara Wells and Nan. The very air has been full of 'ahs' and 'ohs,' and pretty sentiments."

"Now, father, don't get so sarcastic in your advancing years," laughed Nan.

"Advancing years! If you don't look out you will be an old maid yourself," retorted Mr. Ellery.

"Have I called you one, that you are so hard on me? How can you make your own child appear ridiculous? Billy, go on and tell me about your farm. I only heard at the supper table that you had taken one."

The previous conversation, if only mildly humorous, certainly need not have been depressing in its effect; yet the thought of Nan not liking a man to be a farmer—worse still, the idea of this section of country being haunted by a sentimental college professor, made Billy uneasy and inclined to gloom. He gave a dry response to Nan's question, and began talking of impersonal matters.

"Where is the Professor?" persisted Mr. Ellery. "Why don't he come out? Is he afraid of the dew?"

"He is talking with mother; he knows friends of hers."

"I'll warrant he does. I never knew anybody from New England who did not know friends of your mother," said the old farmer.

In a few moments the party in-doors came to join the three without. First came Miss Sara Wells, with whom Billy had already a slight acquaintance; then Mrs. Ellery, anxious lest they take cold; last, the "Professor," looking very manly and dignified, and soon appearing both sensible and interesting. There was no reason why the Professor should not have found the same true of Billy, for the latter aroused himself, so as not to seem stupid to Nan, and talked and jested with the rest.

All the while, as they were there together, however, Billy was arguing with his jealous

fears, and trying to allay them. How perfectly natural it was that Nan should make agreeable acquaintances, and invite them to her home. If she did so, what concern was it of his? None whatever, he assured himself; yet all the time he knew he meant—what if some acquaintance, like this gentleman, should be finding out how “agreeable” Nan was, should try to please her, and should succeed? That was his concern. The fear and jealous pain of the very thought, let him plainly realize he had given all the love he had to give to any human being, to this woman. She shared it with no father, sister, or brother—only with the faint memory of a long dead mother; and Billy was of a nature to feel with his might, where he felt at all. As a boy, he had awakened to his first love for her, when poor Ned Fenton had seemed to please her girlish fancy; now, as a man, he was tenfold more in earnest.

With Nan herself, he was aware he had made no headway. They had been continually separated, meeting often, but in tantalizing ways like the present brief interview; and their old-time, commonplace familiarity was an obstacle to any nearer understanding. Nan, at least, made it so, by assuming always that she knew all about him—or, sometimes it was that he fancied she did not care to know anything about him, which was equally grievous to his heart and his pride.

Billy was unconscionably proud in one respect. Nan, as the only child of a rich farmer, was considered a “catch,” by the young men thereabouts, and Mr. Ellery often laughed at the interest they took in him. Knowing this, Billy set a task always before himself, the gaining of a position among men, honorable, if relatively humble, and something to call his own, before he would even venture to make the first direct effort to win Nan Ellery's love. He would do

this, lest somebody should dare to say he was mercenary, was "after a rich wife." Early in the evening, as he heard Nan singing, he was fancying himself a little older, wiser, in every way more worthy of her; was verifying the poet's words:

"The thing we long for, that we are,
For one transcendent moment,
Before the present, cold and bare,
Can give its sneering comment."

But the last lines had been truest after the Professor appeared. He called himself a fool, and a very presumptuous one at that.

"Let us go down the lane by the orchard," exclaimed Sara Wells, in a pause of the conversation. "I want to see the apple blossoms in the moonlight."

Mr. Ellery nodded slyly at Billy, as much as to say: "Did I not tell you we were sentimental these days?"

Billy did not heed him, for as the young people instantly assented to Miss Wells' plan,

he sprang quickly into place by Nan. They left Mrs. Ellery expostulating about dew, night air, and malaria, and strolled away laughing and chatting.

"What did you give for your farm, Billy?" was Nan's first practical speech.

"It is not paid for yet, nor will it be in some time. Haywood asked five thousand dollars. I gave five hundred down and agreed to pay so much each year until it is paid for in full."

"You will have work enough ahead of you to keep you out of mischief," said Nan.

"I am not afraid of work, but I don't want work just for work's sake," he returned.

"Nobody wants that. There is a rainbow with a pot of gold at the end of it before every one of us, is there not, Sara?" Nan asked, laughingly, as she stopped to get a ruffle of her dress off a briar.

"Certainly," replied Sara; "so you must re-

member what you read this morning—Strive: yet I do not promise

“ ‘The prize you dream of to-day
Will not fade when you think to grasp it,
And melt in your hand away.’ ”

“That is particularly adapted to you, Billy,” began Nan, as Sara went on with her companion. “Don’t set your affections on this farm of yours, and fancy you will astonish us all. Say to yourself that crops fail, droughts come, and there is the busy little potato bug, on which I heard father growing eloquent a while ago.”

“Your father said you were sentimental, but I do not perceive it.”

“I am not, but the Professor is,” she answered, laughing low to herself, and starting in surprise when Billy exclaimed:

“I detest him! What is he doing here, anyway?”

“Why, you never saw him before! He is visiting us, with Sara Wells.”

"I never want to see him again."

"He is a very scholarly man and a perfect gentleman."

"So much the worse."

"What a savage you are," remarked Nan, coolly.

"I hope he is going to marry Miss Wells."

"Sara is engaged to a young minister out West."

Billy was desperate. He had no controlling idea beyond the thought that he could not and would not strive for years to come after something that he must lose after all. He would rather know once for all that striving was utter folly. He did what he had always said he must not do. He told Nan that he loved her, that for five years he had hoped and feared, planned and waited, expecting to keep silence for a long time to come, but he could not hold his peace any longer. Words came fast, and much was told in a short time. He gave Nan no

chance to speak, had she wished to do so; but if she were proud, there was nothing in this man's confession that need irritate her, and if she were not "sentimental," she could not but be moved by his earnestness, unless she disliked him.

By the way she drew back he feared she felt an aversion to him, and he ended with the sudden pained query: "You can't like me, perhaps; but you don't dislike me, do you, Nan?"

She spoke then, impetuously: "I am dreadfully sorry for it all! I like you—that is just it—like you, and that is all of it, or that there ever can be of it; so don't say another word! Come, Sara! Let us go back now, we have gone far enough."

The Professor was studying the moonlit landscape from the top of a stone fence, and took his time about coming down. Billy said good-night in haste, and strode along the lane homeward. If he "writhed" in the days

that followed, even sharp-eyed Prissy failed to detect it. He went about his farm work with the energy of a young giant; and all the steady-going farmers in that part of the country prophesied that Knox would succeed, for there was "no nonsense about him."

A few days after this evening walk, Sara and the Professor departed from the Ellery's. Nan remained with her mother, but Billy seldom saw her.

CHAPTER XVI.

FATHER HAMILTON'S TEST.

IF there was a trouble in Billy's heart about these days, he took the wisest way to conquer it; for with tireless industry and intelligent energy he gave himself to his farm work. Much as Silas Barnard liked Billy, he had joined himself to him with some doubts about his entire ability to "run a farm." His doubts vanished with a rapidity he could hardly have explained to an outsider's satisfaction. Before Billy had done anything in the least remarkable in an agricultural way, Silas was sure he could accomplish whatever his hand found to do; and certain it was he showed a great deal of foresight and sagacity in all his operations.

The first season was one of the most favorable a farmer could desire. There was just enough sun, just enough rain, and as the summer months passed, Billy had every reason to anticipate a bountiful harvest.

He was particularly satisfied with his barley, which was coming on splendidly, and he resolved to cultivate it more extensively each year; for no crop could be easier to raise, less exhausting, or bring in better returns. He watched it with great interest, and at last, in just about three months' time from sowing it, his barley crop was grown, thrashed, and ready for market. It had not lodged, and was not stained in harvesting, but was in every respect of a quality to command the highest market price. From his twenty-five acres he had thirty-five bushels to the acre, and he readily sold it to the Sef-ton brewery for eighty cents a bushel, making his share of the profits three hundred

dollars, and the same amount, of course, went to Haywood.

The day he sold his barley, he reflected that everything else about the farm promised equally well, and naturally he was exceedingly gratified. After supper that same night, he went over to the farm to report himself to Mr. Ellery, according to the latter's request. Knox had been frequently to the Ellery farm throughout the summer, but he went very seldom within doors, and when he saw Mrs. Ellery he had not seen her daughter. Nan did not openly avoid him. He sat two pews away from her every Sunday, and he knew just how the pink rose-buds on her best bonnet fell against the rings of soft hair over her left ear. But he had made up his mind not to annoy her in the future; perhaps he was the least bit sulky when he remembered the Professor, who, in Billy's slightly disturbed imagination, was always, as he saw him last, perched

on the stone wall, in the moonlight, ready to descend and conquer when he would.

This evening, as Billy entered the house, he found the family together in the dining-room, and, a little to his surprise, Nan greeted him with unusual cordiality; but he vaguely understood that knowing she had hurt him, she might be endeavoring to be doubly kind.

Farm matters were talked over, and Billy lingered until the lamps were lighted; then until the school-house bell began to ring for the Wednesday evening meeting.

"I can't go over there to-night, Nan," said Mrs. Ellery. "My rheumatism is troubling me again, and your father is too tired, he says; so Billy can go and come with you, if he will; these evenings are pretty dark."

Nan colored, but said to Billy, very simply: "I will be glad to have you do so." Then she put on her bonnet and made ready to go. On their way to the school-house

she talked rapidly, and drew him into the half-playful style of dialogue once common between them. Billy took his part easily, for to talk seriously with Nan was more difficult in his present state of mind toward her. He had carried himself bravely these past months; but more sun must shine, and more rain fall on the young farmer, before he could outgrow his old love. When they reached the school-house they found about twenty neighbors assembled, and already singing the hymn, "Nearer, my God, to Thee!"

There was no vacant place by the door, for here, as often in larger prayer-meetings, the attendants chose their seats as if with a view to sudden flight from the spot; so the new comers were forced to go forward, and sit side by side.

In the chair by the battered desk, where by day the school-teacher sat, was an old man, who was universally esteemed for his

blameless character. His words were usually few, but they always came from the heart; and so, as Goethe says, they never failed "to go to the heart." Being feeble, he did not stand, and because he was too dim-eyed to read out of the fine-print Bible there, he merely folded his trembling hands, and sitting, with the mellow lamp-light on his silvery hair, said :

"I have only two short verses in my mind to-night, but they mean whole volumes. One means the most honest outcry that a human soul can send up to its Creator; and the other means the greatest work the Almighty Father can do for his children. The first is an awfully solemn prayer, if we can only comprehend it, my friends. Don't ever dare to say carelessly to your Maker: 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts.' Above all, never fall into the error of supposing you can sincerely pray that prayer, and have the

matter end there. As sure as the heaven is above you, it will sooner or later be true, that: "The Lord, your God, proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.' Now if we have a secret sudden shrinking from uttering that prayer, it is more than probable, either that we know of a sin hidden in our hearts, or we fear some permitted one may be there, and that God's search will bring it out before our unwilling eyes.

Each one of you can tell for himself, as he sits here to-night, by just putting this verse as a prayer test, whether he is blameless or not; for, 'He that doeth evil hateth the light; but he that doeth truth, cometh to the light that his deeds may be made manifest.'

"Years ago I prayed this old prayer with earnestness, and I thought it likely that God would pour down on me at once, some rich, peculiar blessing, because of his pleasure in my willingness to have Him read my inmost

thoughts. How I thank Him, now, that I had not really first read them plainly myself. If I had done so, I might have kept them forever as they were; for, although He blessed me—yes, in the end, most abundantly, yet first, He proved me! Oh, when God brings us to the proving, if it need be for our own purity, there will be struggle, or bitterness, or tears, or agony, or loss! But, when all is over, God knows that we love Him, and we know in whom we have believed.”

The plain words of old “Father Hamilton” had put Billy into a thoughtful mood; and he was applying the ideas suggested to his own consciousness, when he was startled by the request:

“Will you pray, my young brother?”

He sat nearest the old man, who was looking directly at him when he glanced up, and who must have meant him. Regaining his self-possession in a moment, he began,

but could not at once forget himself, or the fact that Nan was at his side ; then frightened, lest his words be a mockery, his quick unuttered petition was for the true spirit of prayer ; and soon out of the “ abundance of his heart,” his mouth began to speak.

While he was praying, it came to him suddenly, to say : “ Search me and know me,” etc.—the request which the old man had rightly called “ awfully solemn ;” but instantly after the impulse, there was borne into him the impression that unless he meant it all—unless he was indeed willing to be proven by God, it would be profane for him to go on. Then, as quick as lightning, came the suggestion : “ Change your intended prayer ; say something else.” He dared not do it, for the old man’s later words returned to him, in regard to the reason for a possible secret shrinking from uttering that prayer.

The listeners supposed the young man was hesitating a second from some embar-

rassment, but it seemed to him he was a long time silent, so many conflicting thoughts were in his mind. "I ought to be able to say it," he thought, "and I will, for God knows that I do not want to be double-minded." Then, a little out of breath, as one after a struggle, he finished his prayer, and the meeting went on in the old quiet way.

Before they sang the closing hymn, Billy had wondered how he could have made so much of so simple a matter, for on calm reflection, he was aware of no covered wrong-doing in his life or conduct. Indeed, as he went out into the night, a quiet happiness filled his soul. After all, when the Lord proved his children, what was it but the "good hand" of their God upon them?

"Old Father Hamilton never makes talk for the sake of talk, in prayer-meeting," said Nan, as they walked home together. "He is very feeble and forgetful about common

matters—is just a simple, gentle old man; yet, when I listen to him, I always feel as if in some past time he might have been a hero, although, maybe nobody but God knows it. He seems to me the kind of a man who, if every one else about him was going wrong, would make true to himself the saying I have read somewhere: ‘One with God is a majority; weakness with God is omnipotence.’”

Nan seldom spoke so reverently. She usually kept her best thoughts, but she had been impressed to-night by the spirit of earnestness manifest in the speaker. She showed this so plainly, that Billy soon found himself telling her how the passage of Scripture had, for a little while, staid the prayer on his lips. She understood him, and their after talk took on a new tone of interest. He remained with the Ellerys an hour or more, then returned home, grateful that, temporally and spiritually, it was as well with him as it was.

As communities go, the region about Sef-ton was not worse than many another farming section, still there was in it a great deal of intemperance, some infidelity, and various forms of immorality. The nearest church was four miles from our friend's farm, but just within easy walking distance from them was the school-house, where both Sunday and Wednesday evenings there was held a prayer and singing service. Sometimes a minister led the exercises, oftener Mr. Ellery, or old Mr. Hamilton; and occasionally Billy Knox was pressed into the position of leader. He was a good singer, and when he had anything to say, he said it forcibly.

During the excitement before the fall elections, political meetings were held in this same building, and Knox allied himself with the Temperance branch of his party. His cause was far from being popular, but as he himself was known and liked, he was listened to with more tolerance by those who did not

agree with him than might have been supposed. Mr. Ellery, who, although a man of strong convictions, was decidedly conservative, often rallied Billy on being a young "radical." The simple truth was, the latter's Christian character was developing steadily, and according to a certain individuality he possessed. He had not, like many a young man, seemed to come into religion as a sort of respectable family inheritance, like a name, a social passport, a something added to him from the outside, but his Christianity started within and was silently penetrating all his thoughts and purposes. Why it was working thus is easily explained: he had studied his Bible, and prayed with the whole-heartedness he once put into study, and which he now put into farming.

Since that Sunday night in the Sefton Academy, he had never repented him of his prayer: "Teach me to do thy will; thy Spirit is good: lead me into the land of upright-

ness." If he knew himself, he wished to be led; he meant to follow, and would listen to the breathing of the Spirit. Naturally full of life and humor, he gave his surface thoughts to anybody, and it was only on closer acquaintance that one detected the workings of a singularly sensitive conscience, the warmth of an intense nature, loving and loyal—one who would "find quarrel in a straw when honor's at the stake."

After all the issues of the Fall election were settled, Knox's interest in temperance matters was only just thoroughly aroused; and it came to be a common thing for him to gather a crowd about him, talking briskly in the little building which was the post-office, grocery and general rendezvous of the neighborhood. It was evident that he had no private ends to serve, and it was too late for him to be electioneering for any one, so the discussions he started were usually carried on very amicably. However, when the conclave

broke up, about a third of the hangers-on proceeded to cross the road to "Holmes's" bar, and get a schooner of lager, if nothing stronger.

Now Knox's eloquence was always expended on the sin and folly of buying, selling or manufacturing strong liquors; for unconsciously he had considered beer rather small game to hunt down. He disapproved of it from early associations; he sometimes reflected that Ned Fenton began his brief and sad career with beer drinking, but never until this first winter after he took his farm, did he begin to realize that just here was an unguarded trap-door that let many a poor creature into a current setting toward perdition. He said as much as this to Silas Barnard, one day; and received the following reply:

"Shoo! now that's tall kind of talk! I aint any guzzler, yet I take a glass of beer myself, say once a month mebbe, and I aint one whit

nearer perdition for it than that humbly, red-headed baby is."

Before Prissy's wrath would allow her to defend her infant's beauty, Billy replied: "No, I admit you are not, for you have no craving for it; you have a cozy home, a table with good food, tea and coffee fit for a king; you don't want beer often; but Jerry Whitby, who used to take it as seldom, now that he has lost his home, his wife, and most of his money, he is getting beer almost every time I pass Holmes's tavern."

"Jerry ought to know better."

"He may know better, but he does not do better; and if he could not get beer he would be healthier, wealthier and wiser."

"Well, he always can, and I guess he always will be able to get beer until the last wave of the star-spangled-banner; it looks that way to me. So what's the use of fretting yourself over what you can't help?"

“If I can't help beer-selling I may keep somebody from beer-drinking.”

“Mebbe—by chokin' or pizen. I think it is all a question of self-control, and you can't keep much of anybody but Billy Knox out of the folly business. It is different with beer from what it is with whiskey; you can prove that is a curse on the community; but plenty of folks will face you down that beer is a strengthening, innocent drink. I like it once in a while myself,” said Si, honestly.

Billy was balancing Jack on one foot, and Jill on the other; and as the idol was in his lap, he looked somewhat like a Chinese pagoda with the god sitting in the front door. He mused a while in silence, and then laughingly remarked:

“I knew a Dutchman once who said there was no argument so convincing as a ‘bald-headed’ fact. I am going over to see Dr. Higbee, some day, and inquire into the nourishing and strengthening properties of beer.”

“And when you have facts you won’t do a particle of good with them,” said the faithless Si, adding: “One time I see a regular rabid old temperance lecturer tackle Tom Sykes, the toper, and describe his stomach to him—how it was all et up with alcohol, and red like raw beef steak. ‘Jest think now, Sykes,’ ses he, ‘in what an awful looking state the inside of your stomach must be!’ and Sykes he tittered right out, and ses he, ‘Why, bless you, nobody sees it’—that’s all he cared for facts.”

Billy laughed outright, but was not at all discouraged by Silas’ lack of enthusiasm. He resolved to do his duty in his day and generation, to take his stand on the side of good morals, and the best interests of his fellow-men. Whenever he thought of Ned Fenton, he remembered the hosts of good-natured, lovable fellows, just so easily tempted as Ned had been, and he strongly desired

to help any such who might come in his way by every means he could exert.

One day, about this time, Knox had to go into Sefton on business; and passing Dr. Higbee's office, he bethought himself to drop in for a chat with the old man. He found him resting after a long ride.

"Well, Knox, I hear a very good account of you! Did a fine thing, I guess, taking that farm; there's work to do, but it will keep you steady as a clock. How are they all out to Ellery's? That's a pretty girl the old gentleman has! He had her in town the other day, and stopped to introduce me to her. I declare, I was sorry I was almost seventy. Whose horse is that, yours?"

"Yes," replied Billy, warming his hands by the doctor's red-hot stove.

"It is a good-looking beast. Yes, and I hear you are coming out strong on the temperance question. Well, go ahead, there's work enough on that line."

"Doctor, do you ever drink beer?" asked Knox, finding that the old fellow was in a genial mood.

"Never, now-a-days. I used to take a glass once in a while. I got into the way of it tramping in the Bavarian Alps forty-odd years ago. I fancied then that beer was the secret of those peasants' strength. I remember once going from Murnan, a charming spot, to a hamlet a day's journey off. Just at sunset, entering the village, I passed an old woman washing her feet in a brook, and trying on some finery like a young girl. She said she was seventy-one years old, and had walked nineteen miles that day. Later, as she was drinking her big mug of beer on a bench outside the door of a house painted all over like a Bible picture-book, I interviewed her, and concluded air, plain food, and above all, constant out-door, vigorous exercise had made her tough—and not the famous beer."

“ But do you think beer, taken in moderation, is injurious, doctor ?”

“ See here ; I have something near by that will answer you ! The ‘ Physio-Medical Recorder ’ says :

“ ‘ It is now a conceded physiological fact that ardent spirits, in every shape and form, from small beer to alcohol at one hundred per cent., impede and impair digestion, and are adverse to the whole alimentary process

* * * The idea that liquor aids digestion is both erroneous and absurd ; for, so far from that, it weakens the nerves, stultifies the brain, cowers the heart, and materially injures the whole human organism.’ I believe that, every word of it.”

“ Yes, no doubt it is true, as regards stronger liquors ; but many excellent people insist that beer does them good — builds them up when they are run down.”

“ Oh, of course. Scores of my patients prescribe it for themselves. It is even more

popular than bitters; but every one of these excellent people is the 'wictim o' gammon,' as Sammy Weller said of his 'pa.' If you want particulars, hear this: it is the word of Dr. Crothers, the editor of the 'Quarterly Journal of Inebriety.'

“ ‘The use of beer is found to produce a species of degeneration of all the organism, profound and deep-seated. Fatty deposits, diminished circulation, conditions of congestion, and perversion of functional activities, local inflammation of both the liver and the kidneys, are constantly present. Intellectually, a stupor amounting almost to paralysis, arrests the reason, precipitating all the higher faculties into a mere animalism, sensual, selfish, sluggish, varied only with paroxysms of anger that are senseless and brutal. In appearance, the beer-drinker may be the picture of health, but in reality he is most incapable of resisting disease.

A slight injury, severe cold, or shock to the body or mind, will commonly provoke acute disease, ending fatally. Compared with inebriates who use different forms of alcohol, he is more incurable, and more generally diseased. The constant use of beer every day gives the system no time for recuperation, but steadily lowers the vital forces; it is our observation that beer-drinking in this country produces the very lowest forms of inebriety, closely allied to criminal insanity. The most dangerous class of tramps and ruffians in our large cities are beer-drinkers. It is asserted by competent authority that the evils of heredity are more positive in this class than from alcoholics. If these facts are well founded, the recourse to beer as a substitute for alcohol merely increases the danger and fatality following.' ”

“ But I was not talking about immoderate beer-drinking. Your patients are not

tramps nor ruffians, nor likely to be, are they?"

"No, certainly not; but there is no good in beer-drinking, let little or much be taken. Liebig declares that:

" 'The whole purpose of brewing is to get rid of the nitrogenous, blood-forming elements of the grain, and to transmute the useful sugar into alcohol.' He says: 'We can prove with mathematical certainty that as much flour as can lie on the point of a table-knife is more nutritious than eight quarts of the best Bavarian beer.'"

The old doctor paused a moment for breath, and then went on with renewed energy. "Horace Greeley hit the nail on the head in something he wrote once. Horace had hobbies, but he was sound in this.

" 'They greatly mistake who in this country hope to live longer by drinking wines or malt liquors than they would expect to if

addicted instead to distilled spirits. True, there is less alcohol in the same quantity of the fermented beverages, but the same quantity will not content them. Deceive themselves as they may, it is the alcoholic stimulus that their depraved appetites exact, and if indulged at all, they will be indulged to the constantly receding point of satisfaction. The single glass of wine or beer per day which sufficed at the beginning will soon be enlarged or repeated. It was enough to start the blood into a gallop yesterday, but falls short to-day, and will not begin to do to-morrow.' "

The doctor stopped to give Billy a chance to make any remark, but the young man only said: "Go ahead, doctor; I came to get your ideas, not to give you mine."

"Well, I am giving you the opinion of abler men than Higbee; and if you are getting up a temperance lecture, I can furn-

ish you no end of facts, statistics, and authorities, all reliable and weighty. I am glad you are taking up this subject. Alcohol is an unmitigated curse; and Dr. Willard Parker knows what he means when he says it is one, 'whether in wine, or ale, or whiskey, for it is killing the race of men.' Yes, I am fully convinced—and I have formed my opinions slowly—that we multiply diseases, poverty, crime, laziness, and every stage of idiocy, insanity and drunkenness, when we multiply beer-drinkers. I believe it, after nearly fifty years' experience as a physician; and if you want similar testimony from wiser men, I can give it to you."

"Your opinion is enough for me," returned Billy; but the doctor was tumbling the pamphlets which strewed his table, and began again:

"Dr. Charles R. Drysdale, the senior physician of the London Metropolitan Free Hos-

pital, referring to alcoholic beverages as opposed to health, says :

“ ‘ Beer, wine, and spirits are all, in my recollection, associated with such a series of sufferings, horrors, and human depravity that I have a kind of superstitious dislike to seeing any one I love and respect countenancing in the slightest degree, by example or precept, these dangerous drugs. It is in London, above all, that the physician learns what are the diseases caused by beer-drinking, since London is famous for its beer.’ Then hear this too :

“ Dr. Edwards says : ‘ The diseases of beer-drinkers are always of a dangerous character, and, in case of an accident, they can never undergo the most trifling operation with the security of the temperate. They almost invariably die under it.’

“ Dr. Grinrod, a prominent London physician, says : ‘ A copious beer-drinker is all one vital part. He wears his heart on his

sleeve, bare to a death wound even from a rusty nail or the claw of a cat.'

"Dr. Gordon says: 'The beer-drinkers, when attacked with acute disease, are not able to bear depletion, and they die.'

"Dr. Nixon says: 'Intoxicating drinks, whether taken in the form of fermented or distilled liquors, are a very frequent predisposing cause of disease.'

"You see, Knox, I am taking the professional, and not the moral view of beer-drinking, but the one ought to stand for the other. No person has a right to injure his own body, nor any one's else. I neither drink myself nor prescribe beer for others."

"How much alcohol does lager beer contain?" asked Billy.

"From five to eight per cent., according to its strength."

"What I started out to learn was if beer ever was really helpful, if it ever did promote digestion, and"—

"I was going to tell you," broke in Dr. Higbee, "that Liebig answers this question. He says that 'in the action of the gastric juice on the food, no other element takes a share except the oxygen of the atmosphere and the elements of water;' so if beer promotes digestion it is by the ninety per cent. of water in it, and not the six per cent. of alcohol, nor the two and two-thirds per cent. of gum, nor the one and one-third per. cent. of other ingredients. He goes on to show that all substances which can arrest the phenomena of fermentation and putrefaction in liquids, also arrest digestion, when taken into the stomach. Nothing will do this equal to alcohol; therefore the alcohol of lager must interfere with digestion, not promote it."

"I am convinced," was Billy's comment.

"I will give you some pamphlets to read," said the doctor. He had just collected them when a patient arrived and the interview ended.

When Billy next addressed his little audience in the shop, his arguments were more methodically thought out, his style was really spirited, and his effort quite worthy to be called a "temperance lecture." Before the winter was over his opinions were known far and wide. The best part of the community sympathized with his sentiments, but a slight hostility toward him made itself apparent in the proprietor and patrons of "Holmes's" bar. It was the opinion of these individuals, that he was "putting on airs, and would do well to mind his own affairs."

CHAPTER XVII.

A RANDOM SHOT.

DWELLERS in a city are accustomed to grand parades, to informal fireworks, to noise, in short to all kinds of excitement. They can hardly understand the interest of a Fourth of July celebration in a large country town. Such an affair occurred in Sefton the second year of Billy's farming, and was greatly enjoyed by the inhabitants. The Fourth happened on a bright day, and by nine o'clock the Barnards were ready to start for the field of operations. Prissy, as she stowed her three youngsters away in the wagon, warned Silas to watch Urban (the idol), for he would surely eat any torpedoes or fireworks that came to hand. She

solemnly adjured the twins not to squeeze orange juice over their new pink frocks, and then she began wondering why Billy Knox did not appear.

"Don't feeze and fret!" said Silas, picking up the reins. "Billy is going to Sefton along with the Ellery's. The old man has got a lame wrist, and he wanted him to drive."

"Oh, has he? Well, hurry, Silas, or we shall be late."

"No, there they be now, just ahead of us. Billy didn't care about the parade. He said he shouldn't go into town until noon, but I suppose he had to be accommodating."

"Yes, he can accommodate himself to Nan's movements almost any time," said Prissy, forced just afterwards to put her fingers down Urban's throat, after an agate button. He certainly did think his stomach was the best receptacle for any rubbish about the outside universe. The spluttering ended,

Prissy noticed that Silas was lost in meditation.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked.

"Why, that!"

"What?"

"Why Billy and Nan Ellery! Is he— does he"—

"Yes, he is and he does; and he has been for the last three years," returned Prissy, reckless of all syntax, adding, "but I guess it is all on his part. There, I hear brass bands!"

They were crossing the town boundaries, and soon had met the Ellery's. The teams had been put in a safe place, the families had joined forces and were in the Park, the centre of festivities. The trees shaded them pleasantly; the houses on every side were gay with flags, and the on-coming parade was sufficiently gorgeous. The marshal first (a peaceful citizen, looking to-day like a bloodthirsty warrior), the Goddess of Liber-

ty, the States of the Union (young ladies in red, white and blue), the soldiers of the Grand Army, the town firemen—all were there in proper order. Bells rang, cannons fired, and Prissy, excited by the music, was as lively as were Jack and Jill.

Billy, who remembered many street processions in New York, was chiefly interested in meeting his friends; for everywhere he met familiar faces. Before the oration, however, he was careful to secure the cool corner of a stone porch, where the ladies could be out of the crowd. Perhaps he heard everything said by the long-winded speaker, and enjoyed the reading of the "Declaration," but he did not lose any of Nan's merry comments on the scene around them. Often during the past year he had said to himself, that as he had no reason to think Nan would ever return his affection, it was wise for him to shun her society. That was his theory; his practice was never to

lose an opportunity like the present to enjoy her conversation. He had not been alarmed for a long time by mention or by sight of the Professor, and gradually, his fears in that direction were allayed. He often nowadays called at the Ellery's, and Nan never avoided him.

When the speeches were over, the Barnards wandered off to show the twins everything astonishing that the town afforded. Mrs. Ellery went with her husband somewhere for a cup of tea, leaving Nan and Billy together. They were away from the noise and the crowd, yet near enough to see it all, had they cared to see. Billy was too happy to sit quietly near Nan and talk of the Academy, of their school friends, and similar topics. At last he ventured one direct question, his eyes full of meaning: "Where is your friend the Professor?"

"In Boston."

"Married?"

"Yes, six months ago," replied Nan.

"I am so glad to know it," said Billy.

When the most formal ceremonies of the day were ended, he betook himself to the one large hotel of the town to see a man with whom he had appointed an interview. He not only found him, but with him were many acquaintances, all talking of the news, politics, or business. A few were in very high spirits, owing to excess of patriotism, or the proximity of the Sefton House bar; and after a while, Billy perceived that his neighbor Holmes was behind this bar as an extra assistant for the day.

"Phew! Isn't it hot here!" exclaimed a pleasant-faced man, one of the group with Billy. "I seldom drink beer, but that looks cooling. Won't you have a glass, Knox?"

"No, thanks."

"Don't you ever take it?"

"Oh, don't you know Knox is as mad as a March hare on the temperance hobby?"

laughed a bystander. "It is of no use to ask him to drink."

"Yes," added another, "Holmes here, says he is spoiling the beer trade up his way."

"He's spoiling other folks' interest in it, but, mind you, he ain't hurting his own a penny's worth," grumbled Holmes.

"How is that?" asked Billy.

"What do you suppose I sell beer for, anyway?" was Holmes' loud return question.

"Why, to make money by it, I suppose."

"Exactly! I have bought a public house, and I have got to sell beer to pay expenses. Now you have taken a farm, and you are trying to pay for it, too, ain't you, Knox?"

"That is just what I am doing."

"Very well, then. I sell lager over the counter, by the glass; and you sell lager by a bigger measure. What is the difference, I'd like to know? You raise barley to go in one door of the brewery, and when it

passes out of your hands, you hold them up in holy horror at a fellow who sells the lager that comes out of the other door."

A loud laugh went around, not so much at the significance of the defence, as at Holmes' triumphant tone, and Knox's expression of amazement; for the latter stood a second speechless. Of course, there was an absurdity, or a catch, in this adroitly turned argument of the bar-tender; but he could not in his sudden bewilderment, get hold of the fallacy to expose it. He stammered:

"All barley is not raised for the brewery."

"No; but all that you sell goes there, straight enough, and you know it."

"If I raise and sell good grain, I'm not responsible for the bad use it is put to afterwards."

"I don't say as you are; and by that same token, if I sell a glass of good sound beer, you needn't go ranting around about the misery I'm making. I aint responsible

for the bad use made of lager. I tell you, Knox, we're after the very same fish, with the very same bait; and if your line is longer, and has got more knots in it, you're at the other end of it, all the same. Hello here, Jim, these gentlemen want glasses !”

The laugh had subsided ; the bar-tender was immediately intent on his duties ; and the man who had been interrupted in a talk with Billy about a self-binder, went on as before the digression. In the opinion of the crowd, nothing of any weight had been said. Everybody who owned a farm raised barley. Holmes had only hit on this notion as one calculated, for the time, to silence Knox.

“Where have my wits gone?” thought Billy, half-listening to the praises of the binder. “I ought not to have let Holmes get the best of me like that. I must straighten out this kink, and be ready for him my next chance.”

A new comer greeted him, and later the

incident was only remembered as a slightly unpleasant episode. Then came a Sunday afternoon before harvest, when it was recalled to him by a chance remark of Silas'. They were sitting together in the doorway—the Barnards and Billy—as Si, looking up from a paper, said :

“If nothing happens to that barley out there, before harvest, it will beat our last year's crop all holler.”

“Stop your week-day talk, Si,” said Prissy, promptly. “Remember the man who was going to pull down his barns and build greater.”

“Tell me about him! Tell me about him!” roared Jack, before whom the mention of a story was a red rag exciting him to frenzy. Prissy resigned herself to giving details; while Billy, coming nearer Silas, told him for the first time of Holmes' speech in the Sefton House.

Si, shrugging his shoulders, laughed :

“Why, I didn’t think Holmes had gumption enough to fire such a shot as that.”

“Well, it was like shot; it floored me. What would you have said to it?”

“I should have thought of my smart answer next day.”

“I have not thought of it yet. If it is wrong for Holmes to sell beer, because it is beer, why isn’t it wrong for me to sell what is surely going to be beer?”

“Oh, all your barley don’t go to make beer. We save some for the critters, and some for seed, and”—

“Don’t fool around a question in that way, Si! We farmers raise barley to sell to the dealers, or to the breweries, and we know what the dealers and brewers do with it. We are not so particular, all for nothing, not to mix the two kinds of grain. We know which malts the sooner, and brings the higher price.”

“Just so, we do; but then, we haven’t got

anything to do with that barley after it leaves our hands. You would not say, for instance, that men have no business to make firearms, because burglars, murderers, pirates, and suiciders, are continually blowing somebody's brains out, after they've bought 'em?"

"No," replied Billy; "but firearms are made for honest use, by respectable men; they are, strictly speaking, to protect life, not to destroy it. If a gunsmith could know that all the weapons he made, were bought and sold for evil purposes, what then?"

"He'd better shut up shop, unless a little more or less on his conscience didn't matter."

"Don't you go too fast, Si," said Knox, with rather a grim smile. "Remember I've got this farm to pay for yet."

"Oh, of course, you're only talking, not acting. Every farmer, almost, in the county raises barley. What did the Lord make it to grow so easy for, and let it be just the

sort of a splendid paying crop it is, if we weren't going to be allowed to cultivate and make money out of it?"

"I don't know why, but I am not prepared to say He made it for us to sell precisely in this way; unless I can go on and show that He meant to bless the dealers in buying it, the brewers in malting it, the lager beer sellers in dealing it out, and the poor wretches who may get drunk on it. Why He should bless barley for my benefit, while it is growing one side a fence, and seem to set a curse on it as soon as it gets on the other side, and I've sold it at a good price—this is not perfectly clear to me, just at present."

"Well, now, I guess I wouldn't go into metaphysics," said Si, soothingly. "Just be a practical farmer, like all the rest of your neighbors; they raise barley without a compunction."

"Yes, Si, you are on the beaten track

now ; but is that always a safe way to put down an uneasy conscience ? There was a Scotch preacher who quoted David's words, ' I said in my haste all men are liars ;' and then he added, that if David had lived nowadays he ' might have said it at his leisure ;' nevertheless, Si Barnard, do you plead the fact that other men lie, as a reason why you may ?"

" I hadn't reserved that privilege to myself, though it would be mighty convenient, now and then," returned Silas, striking out after a troublesome fly. " But, see here, Billy," he went on, in a minute, " you are assuming that beer-making is necessarily all wrong, and that beer-drinking is positively evil. I aint clear on that pint, yet."

" Now, Si, you ought to know that the tendency of beer-drinking is to create a taste for alcoholic stimulants. You ought to inform yourself of"—

" You have been at that game of informa-

tion, and I don't believe you are going to find it a paying one," put in Si.

"Yes, I have found out several things. I know that the breweries of the United States now produce one-half as much alcohol as the distilleries. In fact, Si, I will tell you a few things about the beer-drinking and beer-selling, in our own country, that will surprise you." So saying, Billy gave Silas the benefit of much he had gleaned from Doctor Higbee's pamphlets. Si listened attentively, without any clear idea that Billy's "talk," as he called it, was really the result of a conscience active on the barley question.

When Billy's first year ended on the farm, it had been so satisfactory, in almost every respect, that Mr. Ellery had warned him not to be too sanguine and elated. He assured him he could not expect every season would be as favorable, and every crop would not turn out as well; but this second year was

one of even greater promise than the first. He was certain of his ability to meet all claims against him in the future, if only his health was spared, and floods or droughts were not sent to spoil the results of his labor. Up to the Fourth of July mentioned, his satisfaction regarding the farm, and its crops, had been unalloyed; then came a change in him.

Billy would have given a great deal to have been able to forget that speech of Holmes' in the days that remained before his barley was harvested; but he could not keep out of his head the question: "Can I be doing wrong? How can I give up raising barley?"

He must pay his debts, must meet each returning pay-day with the amount due Haywood in his hand. How could he expect to do this, if he were to cut off one of the main sources of his income? As he looked across his wide fields of grain, just ready to reap, he

knew that this crop he should surely sell ; but should he save seed and sow again next spring ? He argued the point with himself each day as he worked ; he thought of it when awake at night, and he came no nearer a decision ; for he always came back to the conviction :

“ I must ; I have no choice. I could not pay for my farm, or meet my other obligations, if I were to stop raising barley.” Yet, if he was doing wrong, was he not bound to stop at once, and let the results be as disastrous as they might be ? He could not ask any one’s advice, for it seemed to him no one could enter into his perplexity and struggle, unless after a similar experience. He shrunk from telling of his conflict, because it must be, after all, his own fight from beginning to end.

Silas Barnard was the only person who suspected that Billy was making a personal application of his temperance ideas, and Silas

saw only his surface thoughts. One evening, in a general way, Billy put the matter before Nan Ellery ; but he stated it so unconcernedly, she failed to grasp his meaning, and even laughed a little about his splitting straws, and getting fanatical. He fancied she would think his conscientious scruples absurd and needless.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“WHAT SHALL THE HARVEST BE?”

THE sunny beautiful days went swiftly by, and the harvest came; then every hour was so filled with work, that there was no time to settle moral questions. They dropped out of Billy's thoughts until the day he carried his barley into Sefton, and did much better than he had done with it the year before. He had been glad last season to get eighty cents a bushel for his grain, and was satisfied with his crop of thirty-five bushels to the acre. This year he had forty bushels to the acre, and sold his barley at the brewery for ten shillings per bushel. As he started for town that morning he found himself wishing that the

great brewery was not so near—if it were in a city farther away he would sell his barley to a dealer, and—and—. He followed the idea no longer. A neighbor driving into town joined him, a man universally respected. He was enthusiastic about the success of a friend of his who got his seed from Canada, and found that it yielded him from fifty to sixty bushels of the four-rowed barley.

“Mr. Waite,” said Knox, “did you ever think it was wrong to raise barley?”

“Wrong?”

“Arn’t we helping along the cause of intemperance?”

“O nonsense! Talk that to this fellow who had forty acres of this Canadian barley. Do you suppose he’d stop raising it?”

“Not if he thought it wrong?”

“It aint in human farmer nature to see it wrong, I reckon.”

The words were empty, but the airy tone

in which the matter was disposed of suited Billy's present mood, and greatly helped him to sell his barley a little later.

In the afternoon he had a pressure of other business to attend to, and the day was gone before all was accomplished. Jogging along home in the sunset light, he began to calculate how long it would be before he could clear off all his debts and own his farm, if he were to go on raising barley, and from such seed as Waite had told of that morning. He was too tired with the excitement of the day to think clearly—too tired to be troubled by the old question of right in the matter. His thoughts, allowed to drift at will, turned backward to his early boyhood, and he saw bits of life as in a kaleidoscope. Blear-eyed Sall, the old hag who sold beer slops in the Water Street cellar;—he could see the cobwebs full of dirt in her own window, could smell the vile odor of her den, and see the tramps who stumbled

down into the dimness and filth, to swear over their coffee and her beer. Far pleasanter to recall was the face of a pretty young shop-girl who used to send him to buy her beer at a grocery. She had it every night when her work was over. At first she sent him with a little blue pitcher, and took it half-shamedfacedly. She used to go herself, bareheaded, for it, after a while, and would stop to joke with men about the grocery. She lost her pretty face and nice ways. He remembered a day when she was drunk,—another day when the women of the alley called her vile names; he had wondered at that, for they all drank beer. That night she threw herself into the river, and a few of those same women cried over her dead body, and said it “was drink at the first” that ruined her. He had forgotten poor Nellie for years.

Next there came to him a moon-lit Sunday night, when Ned Fenton was walking a

Sefton street with him, and they came to the bright saloon. He could hear that gay voice so plainly. “Hold on, Knox! Don’t you want a glass of beer?” He could see the young fellow bowed down in self-disgust another night, when he said, “I am morally weak.” The world was full of weak men, who fell before temptation—and beer was a curse. Knox had arrived at this conclusion already. It annoyed him that his mind dwelt on the subject so persistingly. He whipped up his horse and sang the rest of the way home.

Billy was very tired that evening, and would gladly have staid at home from the weekly meeting; but he had agreed to deliver a message from a man in Sefton to a person who would probably be at the school-house, and he could not properly tell it to any one else. At this time of year the attendance was small, and the best leaders not always at hand. Not being in a mood himself

to render active service, and remembering this, Knox started late.

A few were present, but the evening was sultry and everybody looked dull and drowsy. Seeing a good but rather tedious man at the desk, Billy sank down near the door, thinking he could rest his body, if he were not very much edified spiritually; but soon, weary as he was, he found his mind unusually lively. Now that his barley crop was sold, and that matter decided for the season, he resolved to put aside for future settlement the question whether or not he should sow it again. If he had erred in the past, he must redeem the time that remained by some unusual exertion. He resolved soon to move in a matter that had been suggested to him some months previous: the starting of a "Young Men's Christian Association" in Sefton. He ran over in his mind a list of available workers, and during a lengthy prayer he found himself planning the proper

organization in a way to get it in order before winter. After the prayer and a hymn, the leader chose a chapter from Jeremiah, apparently at random, and read it rather unintelligibly. Billy was wondering if the Association could not from the first carry on a course of lectures, and he resolved that the subject of Temperance should be made prominent.

The lamp by the reader smoked; he turned it down, and then went on with the only sentence that attracted Billy's attention that evening: "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully." Not having known there was such a verse in the Bible, he began to puzzle over its meaning. A man might easily do his own work deceitfully, if he did it claiming that he were working for his master; but this was said of one doing the Lord's work—doing it deceitfully.

Now a man might, for instance, be starting a Christian Association, with the sole purpose

to make other men better, and yet its founder himself might not be right in the sight of the Lord. If the words could bear any such interpretation, would they apply in any way to him? So far as he knew his motives were of the best. "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord pondereth the heart,"—came to him.

Then, as Knox sat there, verse after verse, that he had never consciously committed to memory, passed through his mind. "The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." "All things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." "A deceived heart hath turned him aside that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say: Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

Scarcely a word of the leader's discourse did Billy hear, or heed; and when the last hymn was sung, he forgot the message he

had to give, and hastened out, asking himself: "What have I done, or failed to do, that I should be harassed by this idea of something wrong, somewhere? Do I not know I am a child of God? Yes. Do I not wish to walk in His light? Yes. If I have sinned in some undefined way" — He stopped, standing there in the darkness. "No, let me be perfectly sincere! If it is possible that I have sinned in selling this barley, am I not sorry for the sin?" He dare not, all alone with God, say, unreservedly: "Yes," for that whisper within him, was even then suggesting: "If you sorrow after a godly sort, what carefulness is wrought in you; yea, what clearing of yourself."

How long he stood in the quiet lane, with the night wind rustling the unseen foliage around him, he did not realize. He was possessed by two alternating ideas: either he was overtired, mentally, and so was giving way to a morbid self-analysis; or else

he was about to enter on that most wearying of all contests, a battle with a rebellious conscience, which must be conquered or a conqueror.

It was in vain that he said to himself, that there was no more barley to be sown for months to come, much less any to be sold. He could not longer avoid the moral issue. One question must be answered once for all: Not—Is it wrong for men to sell barley to breweries? but, is it wrong for William Knox to sell his barley for beer-making? He could not stay there in the darkness to answer it, so he went on home, finding the little house quiet, its inmates all retired.

He went to his room, and to his bed, resolved to sleep, if it were possible; but no sleep came to him. "It is of no use for me to ask the opinion of any man not a Christian," he reflected; "for if I were not one myself, I think I should surely raise barley. No motive which had to do with my fellow-

men, quite apart from my relations toward God, would be weighty enough to keep me from it. I don't want to see men drunkards, but I would say they became so at their own peril. It is this calling God, 'Our Father,' that shuts our lips when otherwise we would ask: 'Am I my brother's keeper?'

"If I could only be sure I had no responsibility as to the evil done by beer-selling, after I had sold my barley for making it! If anybody could satisfy me that I am not doing a little to help on the spreading of a thing which harms my fellow-creatures in soul, body, and estate! But no one does convince me to the contrary, ready as I am to catch at whatever favors my desires. They tell me that my barley is only a drop in the ocean; that just about as much beer would be made, and sold—just about as much evil be done, if I never sold a bushel. That is true. I only add a little; but this is not the point. In reality I am doing my

utmost; and if it is wrong to sell any of my barley for this purpose, I am doing all the wrong I am able to accomplish; because the limit with me, is not the amount of evil, but the number of my acres." No consolation came from that train of ideas.

Billy turned and tossed, endeavoring to banish all thought in drowsiness; but soon he had started on a new track. "I am not absolutely sure this thing is wrong, so, as I cannot prove it, why not take the benefit of the doubt, and go on until the Lord makes it plain to me that I am sinning? He can do this. Is it wrong to think that He ought to do it, when I am in such perplexity? How can I know of myself? 'If any man do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.' Yes, but I am going in a circle. I do not know His will, so why may I not have my will? I can have it by saying to this uneasy voice within: 'Be still;' but what if the voice really is my conscience, trying to enlighten

me on my duty? Why, then, forcibly silencing it in this way deadens my moral sensibility.

"It is as true as the eternal truth, that if a man blunts his perception of right and wrong in regard to one line of conduct, he inevitably makes himself duller in distinguishing between good and evil in all other modes of action.

"Can I afford to hurt my own soul? Will I deliberately risk it, and if I do so, what will I risk, and what will I gain? I have yet to choose between the doubtful and the positive; between what may be, and what cannot but be right.

"Now if I sell barley, deciding that it may be all right, I shall make a good sum each year, and I need every cent I can make. I am morally bound to pay my debts. I can give a little to good enterprises in the present, and my future is more secure. I want to get on in the world. I might want to

marry. I don't care to be any poorer, especially as the only wife I want has never been accustomed to pinching. It may be folly to think Nan Ellery will ever marry me, but while I have any hope, I do not want to act like a fool, or a fanatic. Mr. Ellery has always raised more or less barley. He might not oppose me, but he would think me more nice than wise. I do not wish to be that. I will do right; but I cannot afford to be over-righteous. It is hard enough for a man among men to be at par in this respect."

The tendency of this new track on which Billy had entered was rather downward, and he realized it with a little self-disgust; but not until he had said to himself:

"Nan Ellery would not be pleased with such a new departure. She thinks her father one of the best men on earth, and it would look to her as if I had taken it on myself to be better than the man who taught

me what right and wrong meant—as if I fancied myself moved by higher, finer principles. A little thing may turn her against me; and I may lose more than money, if I do what looks fanatical in this barley business."

Billy was by nature independent, but he was sensitive, and fond of approbation. He had worked his way up toward a place among men, in the face of obstacles; and he did not like to fall, in the least degree, in any one's opinion, or to lose a bit of his personal influence. If any one thinks this ignoble, let him ask himself if it would cost no effort suddenly to depart from the settled custom of all about him—surely to arouse the prejudices of friends and neighbors? Above all, if he were making the first move, not out of absolute conviction that he must be right, but out of the belief that in not doing it he might be wrong? There is a difference in the moral heroism of actions

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prompted by these two motives. In the first case one can have the enthusiasm of a bearer of light into darkness; in the other case, he is only feeling his way steadily through darkness toward a hoped-for light. Hour after hour passed, and it was almost day before Billy slept. The battle had begun, but was not to end in one night.

CHAPTER XIX.

NAN MAKES A DISCOVERY.

THAT, to Billy, memorable evening in May, when he had walked down the lane with Nan, had been forgotten by neither of the young people. Billy could never decide whether or not he regretted enlightening Nan as to his sentiments toward her. The result might have been the same had he waited longer, and the disappointment on his part would have been greater.

Nan, on that occasion, had been too much surprised to feel very sorry for the young man who so suddenly^{*} made known his secret, never guessed by her. She had no thought of marrying any one, at present, and certainly not any one whom she had known and patro-

nized as she had known Billy Knox. She was just a little annoyed, over and above her astonishment. It would be excessively tiresome to have any one so intimate with her parents, "sighing around after her;" but if Nan was not sentimental, neither was Knox one of the sighing sort. He let her severely alone for a while, and when he came to see her father, he was apparently as full as ever of business, of energy, and humor. In time, he ceased to avoid her, while he did not seek her society.

It was natural for Nan, in the days that followed, living so placid a life at the quiet farm-house, to give rather more thought to young Knox's character, disposition, and circumstances, than she might have given had her own life been fuller of excitement. It was as well for Billy, perhaps, that he did not know Nan Ellery was making a study of him, in the year that succeeded her refusal of his love. She reflected on what

other men said of him ; she learned to know some things about him through the Barnards, and, on the whole, her interest in him grew rapidly. She assured herself that she should all her life " regard him as a brother."

That day when they sat in the shaded old stone porch, one side from the tumult of the Fourth of July celebration, she had made him tell her a good deal about himself, his plans on the farm, his ideas of the Young Men's Association, to be formed later. They had talked of the books lately read, and found their tastes in concord.

Nan went home resolved to make more of their acquaintance in the future. Acting, later in the season, on this determination, she was somewhat piqued to find the young man rather unresponsive and pre-occupied. She could not know of the perplexity in which he was involved, and therefore concluded he had lost all his former affection for her. If she valued Billy's peace of mind,

this conclusion ought to have given her satisfaction ; as it was, she felt in some way defrauded, and almost indignant, in a feminine and irrational way. An interview, about this time, with Prissy Barnard, did not soothe her ruffled spirits.

Nan had gone over to the cottage one afternoon on an errand, and finding Prissy alone with the children, had seated herself for a little chat. They discussed the number of buttons to be put on Jack's new jacket and the propriety of cutting Jill's hair ; then Prissy's lively tongue wagged on to all kinds of irrelevant topics, and in time she came to Billy, remarking :

"If he was not in splendid health, I should say he was overworked ; as it is I believe he has something on his mind, he keeps up such a solemn thinking all the time when he isn't at work. He is pleasant, but not full of fun, as he used to be."

Nan made no comment, but she looked

interested, so Prissy continued: "If he were not so busy all day, I should say he was lonesome. I dont suppose Si and I are very good company for him. He is better educated, he likes to talk about books he reads, and of things we never heard of before."

"Oh, I have no doubt he finds you excellent company, Prissy. I am sure I always enjoy your society."

"Why, I aint a fool, but you know what I mean. I was real glad when Mrs. Fenton began to be so friendly."

"Mrs. Fenton — Ned's mother? Why, I thought she went away after Ned's death."

"So she did go, but she is back again now, and for Ned's sake she seems to keep a great interest in Billy. She has driven out here several times, and has sent for him to come and see her. He has been too, and said he enjoyed his visit. She has got a right pretty neice with her, Kate Fenton; and between you and me, Nan, I fancied

that had something to do with his liking to go—yes, and his thoughtfulness nowadays.”

It seldom made any difference with Mrs. Barnard whether or not her hearers talked; she was even more inspired if they only listened, as Nan did at this time.

“ Sometimes I think he imagines any young woman he would like might look down on him, because of his coming up from nothing, as you might say, and he is not going to take up with any poor stick, I can tell you; he has his own ideas, Billy has, of good looks, good manners, and good sense. I’d sort of encourage him about this Fenton girl, if I dared. I saw her in the carriage with her aunt, and she smiled on him graciously enough.”

“ Yes, Kate is a famous smiler,” said Nan, rather indiscreetly.

“ Do you know her ? ”

“ She was in school with me at Sefton.”

“ Isn’t she a nice girl ? ”

“Entirely so, for anything I know to the contrary; she is very amiable,” replied Nan, suppressing a savage desire to add that she did not know enough to be anything else. The idea of Billy selecting Kate Fenton for a wife was exceedingly unpleasant to Miss Ellery. In her estimation Kate was in no respect suited to understand him or to make him happy. She remained a half hour longer with Prissy, but while the latter talked continuously in a very amusing style, what she had already said made by far the deepest impression.

Prissy had in her day done Billy many a good turn, but never one for which he had reason to be more grateful than for this effect of her speculative gossip. By the time Nan Ellery had satisfied herself exactly why she did not care to have Billy marry her old schoolmate, she would be much wiser and meeker than she had been hitherto, if not as happy.

It was late in the afternoon when Nan started for home, going by the pleasant old lane in which she seldom met any one. The Barnard children had made a rude seat in a shaded place half way between the houses, and here Nan stopped to watch the long shadows—the sunset light—or to think. She was startled by a very near shadow and a voice: “I have a message for you, and I forget it every time I see you.”

“Then tell it at once, by all means,” she replied, adding hastily: “You startled me—you came so suddenly.”

Knox had stepped out from the near pasture rather abruptly, but he saw no reason why Nan should burn rose color with fright; as a puzzle he let it go, as a fact he thought it vastly becoming.

He leaned against the stone wall and said: “One day some weeks ago, I promised a Miss Kate Fenton, who lives with Ned’s mother, to tell you that she would like to

renew her school acquaintance with you, and she wished that you would come to see her. I go there occasionally to see Mrs. Fenton; she is very friendly to me for the sake of old Academy days, and I ventured to say I would ask you to ride over with me and call some day."

Nan was intently arranging a bunch of golden rod which she had plucked from the hedge, but she said, not very enthusiastically: "O yes; I will go sometime — not very soon, however."

She waited for him to leave her, but he was in no haste.

"Sometimes, Miss Nan, I wish I had taken your advice, and not been a farmer."

"My advice? I never gave you any!"

"Not all duly labelled as such, perhaps, but you suggested several times that I would find it a stupid life."

"And is it proving so?"

"Not a bit of it. It is exciting enough for

me, and gives me plenty to think about."

"What ails you, then?" she asked; and in an instant was provoked at her own question. It did not confuse Billy in the least, although he looked a little grave, and as Prissy had said, preoccupied.

"Well, I might say it gives me too much to think about."

"Perhaps you worry; you must learn to take things easy."

"They take me, and not easily."

She went on pulling her golden rod apart now.

"They say a woman's intuitions are keener than a man's. I wish I could borrow yours for a while," he said, gravely.

"What would you do with them?"

"Try to tell what I ought to do in a season of perplexity."

"Do what you wish to do, unless it is wrong," said Nan, rather coldly, for her understanding of him was wide of the mark.

"I fear I can't make up my mind."

"You are not very much in earnest then."

"I am in earnest to have my own way and prove to myself that it is right."

"Well, your own conscience can be depended on," Nan replied, relieved to think it must be a question of duty, not of sentiment.

"But my intuition is that if you are trying earnestly to prove it is right—it is probably wrong. Right proves itself. The trouble we have is generally to get away from it; not to get at it."

"You speak like a Pythoness; but there is no comfort in your answer," said Billy; and then suddenly changing the subject, he detained Nan to talk of one thing after another, of little account.

It was pleasant to be with her there in the twilight, and when they separated Nan was undeniably pleased to reflect that Prissy might be mistaken in regard to the state of young Knox's mind, and the cause of his

thoughtfulness. However, if she gave considerable heed to the bit of gossip—she gave more thought to herself. She had rather underrated Billy, and realizing it, she could understand that Kate Fenton had naturally enough taken him at his true value. He was indeed, a very manly, attractive fellow. She had found this out, only rather late.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SAME QUESTION.

NOT far from the Barnards, in a tumble-down cabin, lived a man who often worked for Billy and Si. He was able-bodied; and when not under the influence of liquor, a good worker, a kind husband and father. When he patronized Holmes he was as lazy as he was quarrelsome. Knox frequently let himself be annoyed in his farm work by keeping the man in his employ; but nobody else would have him, and his poor wife knew how to plead her case with Billy. The latter had done his best for two years to pull Wilson out of the slough of drunkenness, and sometimes succeeded in arousing in him transient good resolutions. During

the harvest work, Wilson had done well and kept his promise to Knox not to go near Holmes, but later in the fall he was repeatedly tipsy. To Billy's surprise, he stoutly maintained, when argued with, that he had not bought a glass of beer or any liquor in Holmes' house for weeks; and inquiry confirmed his statement. The mystery was solved when his wife came crying to Knox with a piteous story of poverty and distress. She said that for all practical purposes of ugliness, Wilson could get as drunk on hard cider as on whiskey, and he had been getting it all along back of a neighboring farmer.

Indignant at any man who, knowing Wilson's failing, would sell him the wherewith to make his family so wretched, Knox resolved at once to go and appeal to his neighbor's better nature. He was not a man who professed to be moved by any religious principle, so Billy simply told him of the poverty in Wilson's home, and the ill-treatment of

his wife and children which followed every "spree."

"If I don't let him have cider, Holmes will sell him liquor, which is worse for him by far," said the farmer, who stood by his horse by the gate, being about to start for Sefton.

"He promised me not to go near Holmes, and he has kept his word. Now, when he can't get drink he earns enough to keep the whole family in comfort."

"Yes, but he can get hard cider any time he wants it; if I refused him he would only go a little farther for it."

"I don't know about that, Jones. I think there are not many men about here, who would let him have it if they knew the effect on him," returned Knox.

Coloring at the implied reproof, the farmer retorted: "Nonsense! You may think you are lively leaven with your temperance notions, but you haven't leavened the whole lump yet!"

"I did not come to talk 'notions,' but to tell you that there was nothing to eat in Wilson's house last night. He was as ugly as sin, and your cider was at the bottom of all the trouble."

"Humph! If he makes a beast of himself, I'm not to blame—not a bit of it."

Billy broke out rather vehemently, and ended by offering to pay Jones down a sum equal to the amount he would get from Wilson in return for the hard cider, if Jones would agree not to sell him any more that year. His words were too plain to be agreeable, and Jones, in a sudden heat, turned on Billy, with the outburst: "See here, young man, I aint the only fellow who wants to make a little money in the cider business. Hard cider had to be sweet first. What did you do with your waste apples this fall? Didn't I see you carting off several loads to the cider mill?"

"Yes."

“Jess so: Well, I bought my cider over there, made out of your apples, as likely as not. You got your pay at that end, and I’m making a trifle at this. When you stop selling cider apples, come over here and I’ll hear you lecture me for selling what is made out of them. I hav’n’t got time now.” So saying, Jones flung himself into his rattling old wagon and was off, leaving behind him as discomfited a man as could well be found.

“There may not be much sense in such speeches,” thought Knox, as he walked home; “but I don’t want my mouth stopped by one every time I get much in earnest. There seems only one way to silence such fellows as Holmes and Jones, and that is to say I sell no barley for beer, no apples for cider; but if people even now assume that I have somewhat radical opinions, how they will sift me if I take on others which they will consider entirely superfine. I shall have to go to the end of every road that

opens before me. If it is not wrong for me to stay where I am, I wish I might cease to be so tormented by doubts of my position."

With these thoughts Knox walked on, while a curious temptation beset him. He reflected that every man at his best was a sinner in God's sight; that he must live and die as a sinner, only entering heaven because of a free forgiveness of his sins. Why should he then strive so hard to be better than his neighbors, when it counted for nothing, after all, if one's utmost righteousness was filthy rags?

The Christian who does a little more and the one who does a little less, each enters on the career of blessedness hereafter. It is only a question of somewhat more forgiveness on God's part, and his mercy is infinite. Moreover, the Bible says, that whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all; so why, if he must be at fault anyway, under the law, why

put such emphasis on one particular sin, which some theologians would call venial?

For a moment this plausible suggestion gave Billy a certain relief, until he recalled a passage like this: "If we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment;" and for one to sin out of calculation on the Divine mercy—not knowing that the "goodness of God leadeth to repentance,"—what madness was this?

Knox was first startled, then ashamed. Was he, after all, only living a Christian life in order to escape wrath and win heaven? No, he could honestly answer that he loved the light because it was light, that he rejoiced in the thought of living a life getting more and more Christ-like until that day when he should be "like Him," for he should "see Him as He is." But "every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself."

“If I can’t explain away some few things that I have learned out of granny’s old Bible,” he ejaculated, “the Christian in me will never get this barley matter settled as the farmer in me wants to see it settled. Poor, daft old woman, what a change she made in my life, and how well I remember the first verse of her book to which I ever gave a thought. Ben was too tired one night, so I read about the ‘Children of Ephraim,’ who being armed and carrying bows turned back in the day of battle, and I asked her if they would not fight. She looked at me with that far off expression in her faded blue eyes, and said she could not tell, but she believed they were able to do what they ought to do only they were not willing. Maybe there is a remnant of the children of Ephraim left in the land to this day. I believe I might find one of them in my size boots,” muttered Billy, with a shrug of his broad shoulders as he opened the gate and went in to dinner.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE QUESTION ANSWERED.

KNOX wanted a Young Men's Christian Association. He wanted temperance reform, but never since he had the ability to speak in public did he want less to talk about the evils of intemperance. Now this was exactly what was required of him late in the fall of his second farm year. It came along in the line of Christian work. It was what he had done the year before, and none of his friends saw any reason why he should not give again an informal lecture or address to the "young people." They said "young people," but there was always as many middle-aged men in the school-house as there were youth.

Knox was not even allowed to decide whether he would or would not speak. Notice was sent to him that he must, and word that he would do so was spread around the community. The day before the time set Billy shut himself up in his room, and Prissy informed Silas that he was not to be disturbed, as probably he was composing his speech.

They heard him walking restlessly, and when the dinner-bell was rung he paid no attention, but they were mistaken: Billy was not thinking how to move others; he was trying to quiet himself. The time had come for him to settle this barley question. He could say to no other man: "You ought," until he had himself said "I will," or, "I will not." He did not pray that he might see his duty, for he saw it. He did pray, however, after this fashion: first, he stated his case to the Lord, and in a reverent way proposed a sort of compromise. He would give

up barley raising, if he could be assured that in some other way, he should have prosperity enough to balance his loss, and enable him to meet his obligations.

He could find no words to finish, for when half done, he saw it to be a bargain, not a true prayer.

“You had better come to dinner,” called Silas, after a while, and he wondered at the reply :

“I can’t now—I am doing a tough day’s work.”

When he did come down, Prissy exclaimed. “Why, you look almost pale ! I didn’t suppose speech-making was hard work for you !”

“It is not always ; but, perhaps, I shall astonish some people to-night.”

He spoke quietly, not in fun, or mock boasting.

Silas glanced up curiously : “How are you going to work to do it ?”

“Next year I shall raise only barley enough for use on this farm. I have sold the last bushel for beer-making that I shall ever sell. I am convinced it is all wrong, and I am going to say so.”

Neither Silas nor Prissy had had any idea of the long struggle Billy had undergone, before he could say these words. Prissy, in her surprise, dropped a dipper on the idol's head, and Silas gave one prolonged whistle. Billy smiled cheerfully; now that the battle was ended, he was at rest, and happier than for months.

“If Ellery always had the name of being too good for every day, because he would not lie on a horse-trade, what do you s'pose the common run of folks 'll take you for?” was Silas' first utterance.

“A fool, very likely.”

“And what will Ellery himself say?”

“Si, I don't care what anybody says! You need not bother to tell me from this day

on. Now, give me another dumpling, Prissy."

She gave him one, and, woman like, took rather a finer view of the case than her lord.

"After all, people like to see other people follow their consciences, hit or miss, through fire and water, even if they aint prepared to follow. One thing is sure—when you talk temperance hereafter, nobody'll call you a hypocrite."

"How will you ever pay for this farm?" asked Silas, in his turn; but when Billy replied that he had not "the least idea," he let that matter drop, knowing it must be far from pleasant to contemplate.

It was a beautiful evening, and the school-house was very full. From the first word uttered by Knox, it was evident that he was in the best mood to interest and impress his hearers. The preamble of his talk was earnest, and to the point; but he said about

what it was expected he would say. A little later there was a new stir, a sudden curious animation visible on the faces turned toward him.

What was this talk of beer and of barley raising? Mr. Ellery, who was getting deaf, could hardly trust his ears, when with the simple assertion that henceforth he should raise no barley for sale, or sell no apples for cider, Knox went on to tell why he believed it wrong. Not one word of his personal experience or his struggles with his conscience did he intend to tell; only to give his convictions of right and wrong. Nevertheless, no man save one to whom the whole question was of intense practical interest, could have talked as Knox talked that night. Even old farmers, who shook their heads and heard him with placid spirits, wondered to themselves "what had got into the fellow, to make him so wide awake?"

An animated discussion followed the

speech. Knox had thrown a stone into waters which would not soon again be perfectly calm. No one entirely agreed with him; a few commended his consistency, more were wildly contemptuous of his "fanaticism," some were rasped and sarcastic.

When the meeting broke up, Billy was first aware that the Ellerys were there, and with them Stanton. Sometime he might care what they thought of his opinions, but just then he only desired to get home, after the mental wear and tear of the day. He was passing out of the door, when some one shook his shoulder. He turned to hear Stan Ellery's voice, and to see Nan's face.

"Well, Billy, you are as bound to make a sensation as you were when you started for Texas; but I'm afraid you wont get any more followers! You've set a fashion that costs too much."

On Nan's face was an expression half scornful, half disapproving.

Stan's words were as nothing to Knox in the quick pain that look gave him. He did indeed care greatly what one person thought of him. He had hoped against hope that she would understand his motives, would sympathize with him to a certain degree, even if she held contrary opinions. He banished his disappointment as best he could, and thankfully experienced one great satisfaction: he was at peace with himself, and in the days to come he did not lose this best of all possessions, an approving conscience.

As a matter of course, Knox's new departure in the temperance reform was talked of among all his friends and acquaintances, from that time on. No remarkable results followed. The whole question had been first to him purely a personal one. He had not the least notion of inaugurating a crusade of any sort, or even of making converts; but such a decision and such an avowal of it, could not be without effect. Knox himself

was a better, a stronger man for it. He had hedged himself in from similar temptations, had committed himself on the side of right. It was, also, true, that the very men who criticised his strictness received a new conviction of his honesty and uprightness. A few farmers were troubled just a little by the way Billy put this barley matter, and they resolved to think it over, to justify their sowing this crop in the future. Billy was almost sure how the thing would end with several: they would do as he had done.

CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. BARNARD'S SLIGHT MISTAKE.

“**I**F this is not the Indian Summer, it ought to be,” said Mrs. Barnard, standing in the open door one noon of a November day. She spoke to Billy, who, coming toward the house, had stopped to look at the red leaves still left on the trees. He replied:

“Yes—only it is the fourth Indian Summer you have recognized this season; however, I never saw bluer sky this time of year. It is a splendid day.”

“I reckon Nan Ellery thought the same, for she was over here this morning, and”—

A loud screech from Urban, who was pinching his finger in a clothes-pin, cut Mrs. Barnard's remarks short. Billy wished that

he could have seen Nan, whom he had not met since the Temperance meeting, two weeks previous. She had been at the cottage and he had been at her home, but always missing one another, as to day.

The child pacified, his mother turned again to Billy: "Yes, Nan was here, and she asked me to tell you that any time you appointed she would go with you to see that Miss Fenton. I told her likely as not you could go this very afternoon as well as any other time, though of course that would be for you to say."

"It is just the day for a drive!" said Billy, with alacrity, so pleased with Miss Ellery's message that he was ready for a frolic with the victim of the clothes-pin.

Somewhat later, as he made ready to go after Nan, he was alternately happy in the prospect of a few hours in her society, and then provoked at himself for being thus happy. His devotion to her was only rewarded

with carelessness, coolness, and last of all with what seemed not unlike contempt. He assured himself it made no difference what she thought of him, and in so far as her supposed opinion having any influence on his conduct was concerned, he was right ; but he knew it did affect his spirits.

As he drove down the road toward Mr. Ellery's, he said to himself, that after this day he would turn over a new leaf. It was high time he stopped thinking so much of Nan. There were other girls in the world. This very Kate Fenton they were going to see lavished no end of smiles and pleasant words on him. She did not look down on him. His countenance was quite stern for a moment before he opened the Ellery door ; but when Nan greeted him with a smile as radiant as Miss Fenton's own, and exclaimed : " Oh, I am glad you could go to-day ! I will be ready right away !" Knox's heart went up with a bound it would

not have given for any other of all those girls the world contained.

She was ready in a minute, and they started off in the golden light of the rarely beautiful afternoon. At every turn of the pleasant old road was something pretty or picturesque, some walls covered with gorgeous vines or a hedge of flaming sumach. Nan found it worth while to talk of such things, but Billy was more interested in loveliness nearer to him—in seeing that the red roses in Nan's bonnet matched the tint of her cheeks, and similar quiet observations.

“Do you know that Stanton Ellery is going to Europe?” she asked, at last.

“No indeed, I did not. What sends him there?”

“He says he wants to see the world. He came to visit us a while ago, the night you talked in the school-house—perhaps you remember he was there. (Billy remembered only too well.) He came to talk his trip over

with father, who thinks it is very foolish, all things considered ; but Stan is his own master now, and unfortunately he has plenty of money."

"Then you do not think it is only the poor man who is unfortunate?"

"Certainly not ! If Stan had his own way to make in the world, he might keep out of mischief oftener than he does now. Nothing father could say had any real effect. He did not deny that he drank too much, and gambled. He acknowledged that he ought not to have such habits, but there he stopped, as he always stops. There are people of whom — when once you have made them admit a course to be wrong—you have a belief that all will be well ; that their wrong doing will end ; but this is not true of Stan."

Billy, knowing all about Stan's failings already, paid most attention to one part of Nan's remark, and with this in his mind he said : "No, Stan is not likely to go to the

stake for his principles, or even to be fanatical. But I imagine you do not like fanatics," he added, in a tone so peculiar that Nan gave him a sharp glance, as she returned:

"I don't know what you mean."

"Why, if the wrong that a man thought he was doing seemed not wrong in your eyes, — and he ceased it, you, having no knowledge of the workings of his conscience, and only seeing what you considered an error of his judgment,—you would probably sneer at him."

"I should not do any such a thing, Billy Knox, and you have no right to say that I would!" Nan exclaimed, warmly.

She had not called him "Billy," before, in several years; and now, not waiting for him to speak, she went on: "I do not call it an error of judgment for any man ever to cease doing what his conscience tells him is wrong; besides I never sneer at such things. What do you mean?"

“We might as well have it out, once for all,” thought Billy, getting a little excited, and therefore speaking more bluntly than he might otherwise have done.

“I mean that I have given up raising barley, for instance, and you, who think barley raising right and justifiable — you, I presume, have called me a fanatic. I supposed that you—that people would do so, and it made no difference with me; but that night when you came out of the school-house with Stan, I thought—that is, I was sure you were thinking”—

He stammered, and for a man who did not care, strangely enough, there was something of pain in his tone. It touched her, and caused her to answer impulsively: “I was thinking just this: ‘How can a man like Stan Ellery have any idea of a moral issue or of a sacrifice for the sake of a principle?’ He said something very provoking and patronizing to you. I did feel indignant,

and perhaps I showed a sudden contempt for him. I never had any clear opinion at all on barley raising for breweries before your plain talk that night; so you cannot say I thought it all right. That you were acting conscientiously I did know, and I honored you for it. I don't know why you should think me incapable of understanding you," she continued, her voice a trifle tremulous, when looking up, she saw the young man's eyes shining through a suspicious moisture.

He reddened and laughed a little, saying: "Maybe a phrenologist would say I have a big bump signifying a love of approbation, for all I think myself rather independent in action. Anyway, I do care infinitely what you think of me. Once, years ago, you said I did not know anything, and you refused to teach such a heathen. I was angry enough then—as angry as I am glad now to—to"—

While he hesitated how to express himself, she suggested: "To know that I am not

quite so worldly minded—so incapable of distinguishing right from wrong as you suppose I was. If you were hurt by a ‘sneer’ not intended for you, I certainly am not flattered in learning the impression you have formed of me.”

“I told you once what I thought of you,” said Billy, in a low tone; “but I had to cease before I had told half. If I dared to go on now, it would be the same story, grown truer and stronger.”

Not having asked any question, he need not have expected any answer; at any rate he received none, and wondered much of what Nan was thinking in the short interval before they reached the Fenton homestead.

Ned’s mother was very cordial in her welcome, and Miss Kate, her niece, was effusive in her demonstrations of pleasure at renewing her acquaintance with Nan. She was a pretty, shallow creature, and possibly Nan might not have felt so comfortable under her

incessant attentions, but for that unanswered speech of her companion on the way hither. If it were a true one (and she knew it was), Knox was not coming to see Miss Fenton with any such fancies as Prissy had attributed to him.

They made a long informal call; then refusing urgent invitations to remain to tea, they started again toward home; but when once on the way Billy seemed in no hurry. It pleased Nan to make him talk of himself, and with true feminine art she led him on to tell her more than he could have believed possible under other circumstances; but she was singularly gentle and sympathizing.

About half way home, they stopped a moment at the gate of a farm-house to speak to a man who had some business with Billy, and who wanted to make an appointment to meet him later. This done, they were about to drive on, when the farmer suggested: "We could attend to it now,

if you wanted to wait. Let your wife come right in the house,—wont you?" he asked, turning to Nan.

"We could not possibly do it to-night, Mr. Parker," explained Billy promptly. "Next week is time enough."

He drove a little way before he looked down mischievously at Nan, who was trying not to blush, and failing beautifully.

"How happy I should be if that man had not made a mistake!"

There was something about her silence that did not altogether dishearten the speaker, and he became more earnest: "If some things were different—if I were better off in the world, and—would you marry me under any circumstances, Nan?"

"I don't know what I would do if everything was different. I always decide on people and things as they are," she replied softly, yet longing to tease.

"You would not marry me now?"

"Certainly not—you have not asked me."

He did exactly what he had hitherto considered quite reprehensible: he asked the only daughter of the rich man to marry him—a poor man—to marry without waiting until he made his fortune. His only excuse was that he loved her, and because she loved him she agreed to marry him without any fortune.

Neither of them knew in what light Mr. Ellery would view their engagement, but Nan was much more hopeful of his approval than was Billy.

The latter was not conceited, while Nan thought she understood her father's affection for Billy, and what perhaps was an equally good basis for counting on his consent—his respect for the young man's character, his faith in Knox's ultimate success in life.

As they separated in the twilight, Nan said: "I shall quote father's own words to him. He has always told me to choose for my husband a man of firm principles, a work-

er, respected by other men, and one I loved. Now I have done it."

After such a speech it was not remarkable that Billy returned to the cottage in a mood so exuberantly joyful that Prissy believed the "Fenton affair" must be an accomplished fact. Probably he had taken Nan over to be introduced to his future wife. Now, after having held her peace so long, she reflected that it was "high time" that Billy rewarded her friendship with a little more confidence.

Accordingly this night, after Silas and the children were out of the way, she remarked: "I presume you had a pleasant call at the Fenton's?"

"Oh, very pleasant."

"I can almost always tell when you have enjoyed anything, for you are in such good spirits afterwards. You are as bright as a button to-night."

"I have seen some extremely dull buttons,

Mrs. Barnard, but I admit I am bright, and decidedly happy."

"Has anything very particularly pleasant occurred?" inquired the artful Prissy, with a sympathetic inflection of her friendly voice.

The young fellow walked back and forth once before he replied: "Yes, something very good has come to me. Nobody set adrift alone in this world ever found kinder friends than I found in the Ellerys, in you and Silas, and in others; but you can't imagine how lonely one feels who is, after all, outside of a home circle, an individual quite by himself, belonging to no one more than to another" —

"Why yes," interrupted Prissy. "It must be perfectly doleful. I can understand it well. I came to this very cottage to take care of granny, because I was so lonesome I did not know what to do with myself. I suppose that was one reason you used to be so kind to her, she belonged to nobody but

the Lord. But what you need, Billy, now, is a wife."

"I have found one this afternoon."

"I just knew it!" she exclaimed. "I said so to myself at supper, when you were peppering your peach sauce. It was evident you did not know what you were about."

"I can tell you I do know what I am about," protested Billy, laughing; "and I have not found her without taking worry and time and thought."

"Oh, you are too modest. I always knew she would accept you if you gave her a chance," said Prissy, bluntly. Then seeing Billy's rising indignation, she added quickly: "It is nothing against her. Women can't help reading one another like that. At least I never could help it;" and Mrs. Barnard smoothed her white apron with an air of extreme complacency.

"Well now, Prissy Barnard, I can inform you that Nan Ellery is not so easily read as"—

"Nan Ellery!" gasped Prissy. "You don't say you mean Nan!"

"Whom else under the sun could I mean?"

"Why! why! I thought it was Kate Fenton!"

"That little whiffet! O now, Prissy Barnard, is this a specimen of the way you read people's minds?" and Billy laughed aloud.

Poor Prissy was well nigh extinguished, but she rallied at last, to express her approbation in the warmest terms. She was interrupted by Silas, who returned to fiddle for the twins' entertainment, and who asked Billy if he was going out that evening.

Knox answered that he was about starting for Mr. Ellery's house.

"Oh, you are, are you? Well, I often wonder why you aint more neighborly. The old gentleman seems to enjoy having a quiet chat with you most any time."

“Then I will give him an opportunity to-night,” said Billy, preparing to depart; Prissy meanwhile beaming on him like a full moon.

An hour or two later Mr. Barnard would have been surprised, and Mrs. Barnard gratified, to have overheard the end of a long conversation between Mr. Ellery and young Knox.

“A thought of this occurred to me two or three years ago,” said the older man. “It was suggested by something Prissy said to my wife, and I confess now I was annoyed. I did not like it. In plain English, I thought my daughter could do better. Later I concluded Prissy did not know what she was talking about, and my mind was at rest; but I kept on watching you. I like you, and I believe in you—that is saying a good deal when a man gets to be my age. I used to think a fellow like Stan Ellery, we will say, starting with every advantage in early years, with plenty of money—all sails spread, so to

speaking—that he bade fair to make a very prosperous thing out of living. I have altered my mind; there is shipwreck ahead for him, for he has no fixed principles; he controls himself by nothing less fluctuating than his will and his passions. I think it is otherwise with you. You have good habits, and no bad ones; you are a man of honor, a consistent Christian, and your education is really better and more practical to-day than Stan's.

“Taking all this into consideration, with the fact that Nan moves her mother, and her mother moves me, and Nan has already said, “Yes,” I might as well succumb gracefully.—By the way, Billy, there is another matter I want to discuss with you. Some day, when you are over here (take a time when you and Nan have squabbled, as you frequently will do), we will go over this barley question and sift it thoroughly. A man is never too old to learn better ways of living,

and if this barley raising for beer is wrong for you, it is wrong for me."

Tears, of which Billy was not ashamed, filled his eyes, as he grasped Mr. Ellery's hand, saying: "If there is any good in me, I owe it, under God, to you. You were the first Christian man I ever knew, the first man to show me a boy must be earnest, honest and hardworking if he wants to be a true man. May God bless you for all your kindness to me and make me a good son to you."

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